Feasting with Death: A Study of Funeral-Food Practices

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary thesis, which draws on the allied social research fields, looks at the contemporary material culture of food gifting, creation, and consumption in an extended social network in northwest Georgia, USA, from the time of death to the meal immediately following an internment and any subsequent food-gifts specifically gifted in memoriam. To accomplish this, this thesis uses both participant observation and extended, food-centered interviews. Further, to proffer a wider perspective on Southern funeral food practices and to reconstruct a historical perspective lacking in the academic literature, this thesis analyses popular media generated by or about Southerners, including fiction and nonfiction books, music, blog posts, and films.

The chief finding is that the normative funeral-food actors in the fieldwork location are white, Christian, and female. That is to say, funeral food is used not only to construct personal and communal identities but also to perform regional denominations of Christianity. Furthermore, the labor of constructing the material experience of Southern funerals is overwhelmingly the labor of women. Women express this behavior in a matrix of home-made versus purchased, and prescribed versus extemporaneous, food-gifts and corresponding social visits, all under the auspices of what is believed to be and is performed as Christian charity.

Most social research on contemporary funeral-food practices analyses minority experiences, especially the experiences of people of color and/or those living in poverty. Because of the inherently comparative nature of many social-research methods, this focus on minority experiences leaves a large gap in analysis, which this thesis seeks to begin to fill.

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Introduction

When I began my Ph.D. research, one of my new colleague, who was showing me around the department, joked that he studied African Education policy because it was a topic that could not follow him home as he lived in Britain. Two topics inescapable in everyday life, however, are food and death. My grandmother's death marked the beginning of my Ph.D., my partner's grandfather died at the end of my first year, and death, whether from war, terror, or the passing of a beloved celebrity, is an everyday fact of the twenty-four-hour news cycle. Food is even more prosaic, both marking our special occasions and being so mundane that many often cannot even remember everything they consumed during that or in previous days.

The study of funeral feasting is a longstanding and ongoing avenue of inquest in anthropology (e.g., Adams 2004; Beynon, Halpin, and Anderson 2000; Carrasco 1961; Kirkby 1973). However, even with this keen anthropological interest in funeral feasts, the academy has paid very little attention to the funeral-food customs of stakeholders in the United States who self-identify as part of the dominant white culture. For example, Lonnie Yoder (1986) shows how in the American context, the post-funeral meal can act as an important moment of family bonding and transformation during which the attendees can do the important work of grieving. While Yoder does not specify any context other than Christian or post-Christian, his works seem relevant to a hegemonic white context, yet the power dynamics beholden to that position of privilege are unexamined. Elsewhere, Jacqueline Thursby's *Funeral Festivals in America* (2006) is perhaps the most well-known work on funeral foods in America. Thursby examines both the historic and contemporary

funeral-food practices in America, pointing out minority practices such as African-American and First-Nations funeral-food practices, but whiteness remains obscured and unexamined behind the idea of normative Americanness. Donna Lee Brien (2013) draws on Thursby's work to explore the emotive impact and emotional expression in cookery books in the American South and England, and argues that the emotions now expressed in this literary medium reflect a reduction in catering during funerals for those that prefer home funerals in the American context and green burials in the British context. That these studies come from religious studies (Yoder 1986), folklore and area studies (Thursby 2006), and English literature (Brien 2013), disciplines allied with anthropology, is interesting. While there is a lack of academic focus on whiteness in the context of funeral food and funeral feasts within these disciplines, the same lack of attention to this issue by the anthropological and allied social-science communities is an even more notable.

Image: A woman sets out food gifts after a memorial service.

‘I’m happy to help, but we just do it like everyone else. Don’t they do [funeral food] the same way everywhere?’ was a refrain I heard throughout my data collection. The simple answer is that they do not. Funeral food exists as a unique cultural expression in the American South, built with layered meaning and tradition, expressing the unique cultural history of the area. The above photograph can be seen as a tableau that is representative of this thesis. A woman dressed in her “Sunday best” or “church clothes” receives a gift of food after returning home from the church following her father’s memorial service. Her sister stands behind her arranging another food gift while telling a story about the women’s father from before the younger sister was born. Connected to the food she was handling, a guest who had first met the deceased through his greater ties to the community, walks into the kitchen as well, bringing drinks and more food. Though the sister’s story is of their father as a child of a Norwegian immigrant and the third individual in the photograph is the grandchild of southern Italian immigrants, the people depicted here are white identifying as opposed to a specific national heritage. A photograph captures a moment of time, but that moment does not necessarily have crisp edges. The attire and deportment required of the church environment are maintained in the home. Family members and members of the community freely blend and interact in what many consider the heart of their home, the kitchen. Relationships that were once determined through the deceased are now renegotiated betwixt the bereaved. Due to the lack of literature on normative funeral-food traditions in the American South, this project seeks to fill that lacuna while also privileging the agency of those involved in this research.

Aims

This study examines the normative white funeral-food experience in the American South. To do so, I framed the research with the goal of investigating if, in what ways, and to what extent food is important to funeral ritual in the context of specific local cultures of the southeast United States. From this initial aim, I also explore the following research questions:

- What role does food play in the traditions and rituals surrounding death?
- What is the link between normative whiteness and funeral-food rituals in these locations?

Likely Contribution to Knowledge

Unlike other researchers working in the greater social-research context and, more specifically, unlike others in my University's department, I am not building or framing my research with specific policy or functional outcomes in mind. I have a strong notion that my research will contribute to the ongoing methodological debate in the academy regarding how best to conduct qualitative research. I also feel that this dissertation may offer a significant advancement to the same discussion in the multidisciplinary, social-research subfields of food and death studies. In reference to specific findings and outcomes, I also feel that this research may inject new vigor into the academic discussions surrounding the transfer of traditions across generations, not only in these allied sub-disciplines but in the greater anthropological debate as well. Likewise, I anticipate that this thesis will contribute to the ongoing anthropological debate regarding the link between sharing food and sharing kinship begun by noted anthropologist Janet Carsten (1997). Finally, due to the nature of my interview techniques and locations, this project participates in the discussion in the

allied social-research disciplines about the role of insiders versus outsiders in the social fieldwork context.

Chapter Summaries

1. **Framework: Anthropological Approached and Concepts in Play**

This chapter provides an important theoretical framework through which the findings of this study are contextualized, while also offering a reflexive voice that seeks to critically situate the hegemonic power of normative, Southern, Protestant Christian American culture. Key to this study is the agency of the informants in their ability to shape the own narratives and the importance of a food-based approach to the research material that efficiently situates the ability of actors, including objects or even the dead, to affect these narratives. As such, in this chapter I discuss the primary social research theories upon which this study is based. I begin by introducing the ontological turn, a means of engaging ethnographic analysis that seeks to aid the researcher in moving beyond a purely representational mode of analysis. In order to support this approach, material-semiotic methods and actor-network theory are further introduced to more fully address how the material culture of funeral foods can both be enacted upon by informants as well as influence them. After these central theories are outlined, three additional core concepts are introduced as these are key to understanding funeral-food traditions in the American South: whiteness, family, and communitas. In these regards, whiteness studies, an outgrowth of critical race theory, allows for a useful lens through which to examine how the normative experiences reported by the informants also encompass their noncritical reflectiveness of race, while also offering a critique of social research's

engagement of an unacknowledged normative experience. Next, concepts of family composition and makeup are key to my research, as my informants discuss cross-generational practices and traditions, which are often taught and policed by family members, including family-of-choice, as well as the wider social network. Finally, van Gennep's rites of passages and Victor Turners communitas are introduced, as both concepts are key to understanding the means by which funeral-food traditions help to transition a member of the community from one of the living to one of the dead; so too does a similar rite of passage occur for mourners, who themselves transition from the bereaved to productive members of the community, and from their role as defined by a former connection to the deceased and to one which is reconstituted because to their absence.

2. Literature Review: Studies of Food, Funerals, and Family

This study draws from a variety of fields of study such as food, death, and family. In the first part of this chapter, using my specific positionality as an anthropologist, I trace the history of and shifting trends in food studies, primarily in anthropology, with input from the allied social-research disciplines. Beginning with food and consumption studies, I show how food can be used to understand and trace identity and traditions. However, while I note that some literature engages with the topic of funeral feats, there is very little work presently on the impact of funeral food production and consumption on normative individual and family identity amongst those in the American South; mediated representations of funeral food and advances in food centered products in the death industry further add important avenues in considering funeral food's importance to both food and death studies. Over the

course of this section, I analyze relevant literature surrounding the concept of funeral feasts as anthropologists apply it to non-western cultures, and I examine how the concept of whiteness alters the anthropological perspective on the idea of the funeral feast. These lacunae are ones which this study seeks to fill. In the second portion of this chapter, I set forth my working definitions for funeral, funeral tradition, and mourners, all key to this study of funeral foods. For *funeral*, rather than seeking a definition which encompasses a singular and unchanging event, I instead use a definition that allows those assembled to define any event as such should they feel the event properly performed a funerary function; thus, the funeralness of an event could shift to accommodate the informant's lived experiences. In allowing the informants to self-define funeral, this helped to contextualize the various events that have their own specific terms, such as *wake*, *graveside service*, and *visitation*, which were events that the informants all referred to as being the or part of a funeral. Next, *funeral traditions* are shown to be instances of repeated and expected actions; while a singular and unique event done to memorialize an individual might be emotionally evocative for those in attendance, who may even wish to replicate such an event later in the future, it cannot be a tradition unless there is a wider cultural expectation of its presence. Following this, I develop on Tony Walter's (2011) work on primary mourners, defined as 'close to the family', and secondary mourners, defined as extended members of family and friends of the deceased, to include what I define as support mourners, or those who attend a funeral in lieu of a primary or secondary mourner, as well as those who attend as support for primary or secondary mourners as they hold no personal of social connection to the deceased. Finally, the concept of family-of-choice and the use of families, including the families of researchers, are

examined to provide further context from the literature which touches upon the topics of food and death. As will be shown, food, and especially funeral food, are important social markers, and the consumption of specific food items during extreme, emotional events, like funerals, offers an important means of examining food, death, and identity.

3. Kitchen Conversations: Research Method and Design

Having discussed the key theories, concepts, and literature of this study, chapter 3 presents the research method, design, location, and further definitions for the funeral in a Southern American context. While chapter 4 goes into greater detail, the fieldwork area is identified as Northwest Georgia. Participants were chosen amongst members of the community who attended open mortality centered events, and this initial group was added to through snowball sampling. Overall, I was able to attend nearly one hundred funeral and postmortem events during the periods of May to September, which took place over the course of two consecutive years. The interviews themselves would last on average three hours, and informants were interviewed multiple times. Anonymization was a key concern of this study, and while the census data from specific counties in the fieldwork were generalized to provide some anonymization, in order to preserve the agency of my informants I allowed informants to opt-in to anonymization. As all informants deferred to my judgment, I chose to anonymize them for this study. Ethnographic methods such as note taking and audio recording served as the primary means of recording informants' narratives. Along with the above, this chapter introduces the method of food-based interviews, as outlined by Carole Counihan (2009), which as an interview

method situates the interviewee's focus around food. The interviews were further designed as unstructured narrative interviews, allowing the interviewee power over the emotional level that they wish to engage in, an important and ethical measure given the sensitive nature of death. Interviews were conducted in places suggested by participants, which they felt were associated with funeral food, such as church kitchens, dining rooms, and community halls as but a few examples. Additionally, I discuss how I conducted pop-culture ethnography of social and cultural media that presented depictions of funeral-food rituals to provide greater context for the information the informants presented and to showcase the region's identification with funeral-food practices. Finally, I present an outline of the expected flow of a funeral starting from the time of death, as reported to me by my informants.

4. Contexts: The American South and Northwest Georgia

After identifying the region in which this study takes place, chapter 4 provides further contexts for the fieldwork area through census date and pop-culture ethnography and analysis. Using census data, this chapter documents how religion, race, and socio-economic class are reflected in three of the counties which comprise portions of the research area. This discussion of these three counties provides not only a level of anonymization for informants, but it also provides the necessary context for the rural area, which sees travel between the various counties. As will be shown, White Evangelical Protestants are a large portion of the population, which translates to a strong influence on the general norms and values of the area. Following this, the chapter gives further context to the region of the American South through a study of film, literature, and music which feature scenes of funeral food.

While these instances are scripted, edited works, due to the desire for verisimilitude in these fictions, the display and engagement with funeral food provide an important window through which to examine how the idea of Southern funeral-food traditions are visualized and understood. Although there is a lack of information within the academic literature on normative funeral-food traditions, evidence for these traditions can be found in literature, film, and music.

5. Eating with our Eyes: Southern Funeral Food in the Blogosphere

While very little literature exists in the academic arena pertaining to the white funeral-food experiences, there is substantial engagement in the popular culture with the concept. Following the previous chapter's examination of fictional, mediated instances of Southern funeral food, this chapter examines blogs and digital forums that engage with Southern funeral food as a means of gaining further data. While edited, personal blogs provide an opportunity to examine the native thoughts and feelings of the blogger at the time of publication. From these examples some trends can be found: food gifting is usually a gendered process, food gifts facilitate communication and storytelling, food items tend to be regional foods and dishes, and communities, comprising the attendants of the funeral and the wider social network, police these traditions, but not the recipients of food gifts. These findings serve as a means of not only contextualizing the food-based life narratives of the informants, but they also serve as further evidence to suggest that Southern funeral foods comprise a set of recognizable and distinct traditions of food gifting that others outside of the specific fieldwork location acknowledge as being quintessentially Southern in nature.

6. What's in a Casserole?: Material Culture of Southern Funeral Food

The study of funeral food, as a form of material culture, allows for an understanding and an evaluation of the cultural relations in the American South and the fieldwork location. The information provided by the informants is here examined to provide an understanding of the cultural significance in the preparation, production, buying, and consumption of funeral food. As will be shown, there this a separation between homemade food and store-bought, pre-prepared food; however, there is no universal condemnation of store-bought food, so long as the food follows regional tastes and easily facilitates consumption. Equally so, arising from the data, there is also the two categories of programmed versus extemporaneous food gifts, which was not reflected upon by the informants but were nevertheless present in their narratives. Programed food gifts reflect group orientated gifting as they are coordinated and planned, while extemporaneous food gifts are those that are decided upon by the giver without direct influence from a larger group. However, extemporaneous food gifts can reflect food gifts that follow familial recipes and legacies of gift giving. Within this context of funeral food, there exists the concept of 'normal but nice,' a category of food that some refer to as 'everyday food stuff,' yet these foods have a higher social cache and as such are more suitable for funeral and postmortem gift giving. Finally, the materiality of the transportation of food gifts, the location of the meal, and even Food Records that help in organizing, recording, and facilitating the return of dishes and thank-you notes for food gifts are also analyzed within this matrix of gift giving.

7. Church Ladies and Fellowship Halls: Religiosity and Southern Funeral Food

While the previous chapter touched on the topic of religion, in this chapter the Christian values of charity and community are more fully examined through the narratives of the informants. Interestingly, food gifts were never codified as being evangelical in nature, but were rather discussed in terms of general Christian generosity. However, denominational differences in food gifts traditions can be seen, especially in regard to the gifting of alcoholic beverages, which would be shunned in the context of a Baptist funeral, but would be less problematic for Episcopalians. In this regard, food gifts further serve to mark the identity of the gift giver and their ability to navigate the different mores of other religious groups. Along with these observations, it was also found that while the production and purchasing of food gifts was a heavily policed act with some foods deemed inappropriate, when informants spoke about receiving food gifts they spoke about how any food gift was considered a 'blessing,' due to perhaps a desire to appear appreciative of the charity received. Additionally, there was concern that if no gifts were received, it would be an indicator that the deceased was not well-liked in life or was a bad person. The presence of any food gift thus helps alleviate this stress and further acts as a means of sentimentalizing the gift from the perspective of the giver. Therefore, two interconnected traditions of gifting and receiving of food gifts can be seen.

8. Aunt Sara's Lemon Chiffon Cake: Family, Gender, and Southern Funeral Food

While religious ideation has an impact on funeral-food traditions in the American South, informants were more likely to denote family as the primary reason for the continuation of these gift-giving traditions. In this chapter, I examine the gendered engagements with funeral food from the perspectives of production and consumption. Older women, usually referred to as 'church ladies,' were often noted as important contributors of food gifts and those who also provided additional social and emotional labor. However, it also fell on younger women within the fieldwork location to act as hostesses and cooks, while men were less present in these roles. Indeed, men would sometimes even downplay the labor required for the production, transportation, and display of food gifts. Aliveating some of the tensions that might arise due to variances in expected labor from women and men, the concepts of 'blessing' and 'food as love' helped to reframe the food gifts. Likewise, and possibly due to the notions of sentimentality and Christian generosity noted in the previous chapter, the informants did not speak of any portion of the making or receiving of funeral-food gifts as a burden. Indeed, in exploring the importance of family and family-of-choice in the area, this chapter also highlights the connection between food gifts and community, as well as familial love for the living, the recently deceased, and the long dead. Heirloom dishes also emerged as an important category of food gifts, which also serve as a means of preserving the social agency of the person the dish memorializes. Thus, not only did the concept of food as a blessing allow for secular food items to be understood as reflecting religious ideas of charity and

community, but so too did the heirloom dish act as a further means of maintaining community cohesion.

9. Conclusion

Having discussed the wider, cultural expectations of Southern funeral-food traditions in the American South in media, blogs, and in northwest Georgia, the conclusion brings the discussion back to whiteness and its impact on the last empirical chapters, while highlighting future research potentials emerging from this project.

Chapter 1
Framework: Anthropological Approaches and Concepts in Play

Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the primary anthropological and sociological theories and core concepts upon which this study is predicated. In my approach, I engage the ontological turn and extend its implications to include aspects of social network theory and material semiotics that are pertinent to my work. Additionally, because this is a study of normative funeral-food traditions in Northwest Georgia, whiteness studies is especially relevant in situating the value of this work, and explaining how the focus is constructed. Using the ontological turn and actor-network theory, this chapter will show how in my research design, my participants are framed as the experts in their lives and their lived experiences. As such, their specific terminologies and experiences are engaged with and are not reinterpreted, or reframed using semiotic devices, by me as the researcher. Once it is established how the research participants are treated and interpreted, this chapter will then show how concepts from social research theory, such as whiteness, communitas, and the performance of family, can be used as pathways of dissemination alloqing those not native to the research area to engage with topics taken for granted by the research participants as part of their daily lives and lived experiences.

Anthropological Approaches

The Ontological Turn

Paolo Heywood creates a working definition of the ontological turn when he states that '[t]he "ontological turn" in anthropology is premised on the notion that anthropologists are fundamentally concerned with alterity and that this is not a matter of "culture", "representation", "epistemology", or "worldview", but of being' (2012: 143). While this may appear like a *prima facie* argument, greater complexity emerges upon deconstruction. Far from agreeing with Wittgenstein's stance that 'the world is the totality of facts, not of things' (1949: 1), those researching and writing within the ontological turn acknowledge the importance of objects in the lives of those they study. As Martin Paleček and Mark Risjord explain, the ontological turn 'emphasizes the role of objects and artefacts in cultural production' (2013: 5), but this explanation may still be too vague. Instead, it is perhaps clearer to construct examples as Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell explain when researching within a paradigm congruent with the ontological turn:

> [o]ne must accept that when someone tells us, say, that powder is power, the anthropological problem cannot be that of accounting for why he might think that about powder…but rather that if that really is the case, then we just do not know the powder he is talking of. This is an ontological problem through and through. For its answer is patently not to be found by searching 'in the world' – maybe in Cuba? – for some special powerful powder. The world in which powder is power is not an uncharted (and preposterous!) region of our own.… It is a different world (2007: 12).

This approach sets up an incredibly different dynamic with the respondent than traditional social research methods. No longer is the respondent seen to have a different perspective on a shared reality; instead, the social researcher acknowledges

that the research participant exists in a different reality, a different world, from the one the researcher normally occupies. In the above example, the respondent must be believed that the powder is power. The researcher does not second-guess or disbelieve the respondent in the way other basal assumptions must be accepted in the research process – they are the experts on living in their own world. Just as we as researchers would not deem to disagree with research participants about their gender identity or if a fire is dangerous, working within the ontological turn urges the researcher to accept that powder is power in an acknowledgment that, 'by recognising the queerness … of all beings… theories describing reality that may at first seem strange and counterintuitive might, ultimately, be seen as rather ordinary, after all' (Chapaura 2009: 463).

This acceptance of the world presented by the research participant creates an environment in which the researcher concedes to and adopts an '[o]ntology [that makes a] commitment to take non-human entities seriously as constitutive concepts of social, epistemic and other phenomena' (Marres 2009: 18). Practically, for this project, if a research participant was to claim that "food is love" (as several did), I would, under the ontological turn, be expected to take them at their word – not to assume that food is a sign or symbol that represents the abstract concept of love in any way, but to accept that the food spoken of is a physical, tangibly present, allotment of love and as such has all the power active in the world that love might normally be assigned.

Paleček and Risjord's Four Unifying Themes

Keeping the above points in mind, Paleček and Risjord have identified four themes as unifying and indicative of, but not exhaustive of, works within the ontological turn:

1. In ethnographic analysis, look to the most abstract categories found in a culture: person, relation, power, property, etc.
2. Be prepared to learn theoretical lessons from the concepts used by the groups studied, and to adopt (perhaps modified) local concepts into anthropological theory.
3. Reject representationalism.
4. Adopt the extended mind hypothesis. (2013: 7)

I join Paleček and Risjord themselves in stating that the first two criteria are weak features to characterize something as novel in anthropology specifically, and social research more generally, when compared with the breadth and history of the field. However, I will not concede as far as they do when they state that '[a] jaded eye might regard [the first point] as nothing more than the good old-fashioned articulation of "worldviews" with a sprinkling of philosophical jargon' (ibid.), due to the fact that a difference of philosophical mindset when entering the field can vastly alter the perceptions of and reactions to the environment experienced by researchers.

However, the third aspect listed begins to form a more precise boundary of what is being discussed. Perhaps more saliently for those participating in social research, this rejection of representation leads to the refutation of a universal applicability of the theories promoted by noted symbolists such as Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, and Mary Douglas, because those that utilize the ontological turn 'see

the representationalist standpoint of modern philosophy as underpinning the problematic ways in which culture was conceptualized in the twentieth century' (ibid.). Beginning with nineteenth-century philosophical thought, dualist ideology, including that of culture, i.e., the world and the perception of the world, permeates social research methods and theoretical positions, making culture appealing to the academic community and remaining unchallenged until the ontological turn (Holbraad 2010). This leads to the collapse of distance between the physical object and the conceptual ideal, meaning that symbolic meaning is neither abstracted nor divorceable from the concrete object, and it engenders an environment in which 'concepts and things are one and the same' (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007: 13). This leads to a methodical experience in which 'ontologically-oriented anthropologists try to characterize the objects in the way their interlocutors do, without semantic ascent to locutions like "believes that"' (Paleček and Risjord 2013: 9). For the researcher, powder is power and food is love because that is the experience of the research participant and, as the non-expert in that world, the researcher has no reason to assume otherwise except for the imposition of rational imperialism.

I find Paleček and Risjord's fourth criterion of the ontological turn, that of adopting the extended mind hypothesis, problematic, not because the concept is fundamentally wrong *per se*, but because this fourth criterion seems overly limiting in scope. Indeed, Paleček and Risjord present this benchmark as '*one way* [emphasis mine] to work out the consequences of rejecting representationalism' (ibid.). Paleček and Risjord's basic argument revolves around the idea that, as opposed to in a

Cartesian mode, in the ontological turn, 'objects and bodily actions in the environment are legitimately thought of as parts of the mind, and their use is part of thinking. Shifting beads on an abacus, in this view, is not essentially different from doing sums in one's head. The movement of the beads is an aspect of thinking and thereby part of the person's mind' (2013: 10).

Utilizing this position, Rebecca Empson (2007) has applied this concept to her ethnography to show how objects collected from family and friends are neither representational of those family and friends nor representational of the memories of those individuals; instead, these mementos are themselves actual memories and part of the mechanism of remembering itself. This creates an environment in which 'the challenge, then, is for the ethnographer to revise her own views' (Paleček and Risjord's 2013: 11) instead of revising the research participant's experience of their own life and world by characterizing what they have reported about their own experience as a *belief* and then trying to explain how this belief can be maintained. Thus, the researcher is not the expert and does not get to set the vocabulary, because the researcher's vocabulary is not the vocabulary of the world and experience at hand; it is up to the researcher and the academic community to avoid using 'our own analytical concepts to make sense of a given ethnography (explanation, interpretation), we [instead] use the ethnography to rethink our analytical concepts' (Holbraad 2010: 184). If powder is power, the researcher has no need to find a language to explain why the individual perceives it as so. They perceive it as such because it is their lived truth. Instead, the researcher must find the language that allows those that do not know that powder is power a glimpse into the world for which it is so.

Heywood challenges this aspect of the ontological turn, claiming that 'one cannot take everyone seriously at the same time' (2012:149). However, this is only the case when the researcher expects the materials they know to be the same material that their informants know. Savido has similar criticisms of the ontological turn, claiming, in reference to the Nuir (an often cited example in the discussions around the ontological turn), '[i]f birds do not signify family ties or children of transcendent entity (or any other thing for that matter), then there is nothing else to understand besides the ever-so-puzzling assertion that a human being is identical to a feathery being' (2014:4). And, in a sense, Savido is right; in the world of the Nuir twins are birds – powder is power. However, this only needs to be 'ever-so-puzzling' if researchers try to impose their own expectations on the world of the Nuir. In Savido's world twins may be entirely human, but to the Nuir the fact that twins are birds is accepted the same way that Savido's world accepts fires are hot.

A second, possibly stronger example of this imposition in practices also emerges from Savido's critique of the ontological turn. In examining Viveiros de Castro's example 'mud is the hammock of tapirs' (2012: 110), Savido makes the statement 'Isabel's son Michael is my nephew' and goes on to state 'my nephew is not merely a nephew from my perspective but – besides that – he *really and objectively is*[1] a nephew' (2014: 8). Perhaps in Savido's world this may be the case, but nephew does not have a singular meaning even in social research. In Akan kinship, Savido would be the most important figure in the upbringing of his sister's son (Okali 1983); Radcliffe-Brown (1968) even devotes an entire work to the importance of the brother-sister bond when discussing the raising of children.

[1] Emphasis original

Conversely, based on the Omaha kinship relations of the Mapuche of Chile, Savido may be completely unimportant to his sister's children to the point of possibly being considered unrelated (Faron 1956). Put simply, nephew is a social construct and isn't real or objective. Just as it would be a form of colonialism to force the uncle/nephew terms on a culture that didn't use it simply because the researcher's culture found the term important due to consanguinity, or any other reason, so too is it inappropriate to discount the fact that in some worlds twins are birds, and in others powder is power. Finally, Savido claims that '[i]n order for the ontological turn to be completed, one would need to turn away from any kind of representational content' (2014: 10), but this seems to be a *reductio ad absurdum* argument. Representationality is still welcome if introduced by the interlocutor. If a respondent were to state that a particular dish was 'like a warm hug,' then extrapolation on the comparison would be called for. However, in such cases, the informant begins the comparison; the researcher does not impose their singular dialectic on the data.

Thus, the limiting aspects of Paleček and Risjord's fourth criterion return. It is not simply the extended mind hypothesis that the ontological turn shows, but an emphasis on the material central and important to the social lives of the respondents. As such, this is not a theory of materiality in the vein of Kessler (2004) or Ingold (2007). The fact that the casserole is made of potatoes is not the salient fact being explored; instead, with the ontological turn, the physicality of the casserole itself and the acceptance of its ability to cause reactions within those that interact with it is deemed notable. Because of this distinction, the ontological turn may best be viewed in relation to actor-network theory and other material-semiotic methods.

Material-Semiotics

Theoretically, the ontological turn is supported by material-semiotic methods developed by scholars such a Donna Harraway (1999), Bruno Latour (1987), John Law (2009), and Gilles Deleuze (1987). The defining feature of a material-semiotic theory is that it allows for and accepts nonhumans acting on and participating in social existence. This acknowledges the nonhumans' ability to exert agentic force onto the social. These works create space for both the physically present (material) and the conceptually constructed (semiotic) actors to influence the social, and no work has done this as explicitly or as consistently as Latour's and Law's (and their intellectual derivatives') work on actor-network theory.

Perhaps the idiosyncrasies of actor-network theory are best understood via a breakdown of the term itself. Law categorizes actor-network theory as a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities, and methods of analysis that treats everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations. Its studies explore and characterize the webs and the practices that carry them. Like other material-semiotic approaches, the actor-network approach thus describes the enactment of materially and discursively heterogeneous relations that produce and reshuffle all kinds of actors, including objects, subjects, human beings, machines, animals, 'nature', ideas, organizations, inequalities, scale and sizes, and geographical arrangements (Law 2009: 141). Thus, Law shies away from classifying actor-network theory as a theory *per se* and instead classifies it as 'family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities, and methods of analysis' (ibid.). This distancing from the term *theory* is not altogether surprising.

Actor-network theory utilizes and defines an *actor* as 'something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general. An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action' (Latour 1996: 375). This creates an intellectual approach providing not an explanation but a description. Law explains that actor-network approach is not a theory, because theories usually try to explain why something happens; rather, actor-network theory is descriptive, which means that it is a disappointment for those seeking strong accounts. Instead, it tells stories about 'how' relations do or do not assemble (Law 2009:141).

This combination of actor-network theory and the ontological turn creates a methodological ontology in which researchers allow the native, lived experiences of objects and situations to be authentic, paramount, and definitive. Due to this methodological combination, the powder is power, and that power can create change in the social environment. A casserole can be love, and because of that, the casserole has the ability to cause actions and reactions in other actors up to and including humans. When an informant, such as Becky, would say "the casserole makes me happy," under this material-semiotic model, Becky is taken seriously and the casserole itself is acknowledged to have the capacity to make Becky happy. By presenting actor-network theory with the ontological turn, actor-network theory is better equipped to explore positionality and individual narrative. Conversely, by presenting the ontological turn with actor-network theory, the ontological turn is better able to explore both the affect and effect of the power that the powder exists as.

Material Culture

As a study with a tight emphasis on food, the position and conception of material culture is central to this research. Asa Berger describes material culture as comprising the physical objects and artifacts that are the 'things we buy or are given' (2014: 16). Simon Bonner expands on this concept when he describes his work as a social researcher interested in American material culture:

> I am concerned with [American's] bonds to the things around them—houses, art, food —and the ways those things are produced and consumed. Often they are so immediate, so worldly, that they escape the analysis reserved for literature, yet their very worldliness connects them directly to the society we live in. My approach to the subject is to describe things in action, then analyze them as part of cultural scenes where actors can be identified (1986: xi).

This is not a semiotic reading of objects as one might expect from a Geertzian interpretation, but instead an understanding of material objects working as cultural objects in relationships to other influences and actors in line with the actor-network theories discussed above.

Particularly pertinent to this study is that objects have been noted to have a positive influence on memories. Russell Belk notes

> the tangible remembrance of things past can be a good thing. Reified reminders are not the only way of transcending our present time and place, but they are one of the most meaningful and reliable ways. Without these objects our memories may be as ephemeral as flowers. But through our treasure troves of mementos and souvenirs these flowers can bloom again and again (1991: 128).

Likewise, Margaret Jean Intons-Peterson's and George L. Newsome III's research (1992) suggests that while material memory aids may shape memories in some ways, they also aid in memory recall, and, as an extension of material culture, location, and the existence within specific environs, they can also aid in memory formation and

retrieval in individuals and across generations, blending history and narrative (Vedru 2015).

Core Concepts from Social Research Theory

This section will scrutinize the primary concepts from major social research theories that influence this project: whiteness, the conceptualization of family, rites of passage, and communitas. The exploration of whiteness studies directly relates to my research methods because, as shown in the next chapter, the majority of social research on funeral food has disproportionally placed the academic gaze on minorities and their bodies, thereby otherizing them and, due to the comparative nature of social research, juxtaposes their experiences with an unnamed, unscrutinized normative experience. This normative experience is expressed through specific notions of communitas and familial construction and interactions as the deceased transition from present to distant members of the family and the community, while the bereaved enter into a liminal period in the community where the position is reintegrated and redefined. All of the theoretical concepts discussed in this section are important for understanding the full functioning and import of funeral-food traditions in the American South.

Whiteness

Whiteness studies evolved as an outgrowth of critical theory via critical racial theory. Critical theory is itself an antipositivist theoretical model that seeks to critique both society and culture through an active process of reflective engagement (Conquergood 1991), and whiteness studies maintains critical theory's antipositivist

tradition and tendencies. By antipositivist I mean a theoretical framework that rejects the notion that appropriate research in the social sciences 'stresses objectivity, [and treats] the researcher as the disinterested pursuer of scientific truth' (McNeill and Chapman 1990: 97). Antipositivism is also referred to as interpretivism, and under that guise has strong links to the discipline of sociology. It is most often linked with qualitative research methods such as ethnographic fieldwork, conversation/discourse analysis or open-ended interviews. Utilizing these methods, the researcher engages in a qualitative research process in which he or she attempts 'to make sense of how [the research participants] understand their experiences and how this effects the way they feel towards others' (Greig and Taylor 2004: 43). This results in a research account that privileges how the research subjects perceive their world over other data (Bryman 1988).

Instead, critical theory, the theoretical grandfather of whiteness studies, focuses on the 'dialectical concern with the social construction of experience' (Kincheloe and McLaren 2002:88). Likewise, critical theory encourages the researcher to explore and critically reflect on 'the 'politics and poetics' of their work. This a concept has been noted in anthropology ever since Clifford Geertz (1973) examined the difference between an ethnographer describing an eye movement as a wink or a blink. In these accounts, the embodied, collaborative, dialogic, and improvisational aspects of qualitative research are clarified' (Lindlof and Taylor 2002: 53); by doing so, they easily situate themselves alongside the feminist discourses of reflexivity and positionality (Bryman 2008, Sosulski, Buchanan, and Donnell 2010).

Critical race theory (CRT), an academic theory that has been adapted into the social sciences from legal studies, maintains all the basic tendencies of critical theory just stated; CRT's basic premise is that white racial supremacy is embedded in the legal systems and social norms of traditionally hegemonic white nations. By engaging this embedded process in open inquiry, the mechanisms that support the normative oppression of minorities may be shifted (Crenshaw 1995). Jean Stefancic and her husband Richard Delgado situate critical race theory as a response to liberalism's color-blindness that utilizes personal narratives to illustrate embedded legal and cultural issues (Delgado 1993). In research, CRT is usually applied by using 'techniques such as narrative to challenge predominant cultural constructions of race…arguing instead that, by denying the influence of race on the legal system or debating whether race in the form of whiteness exists at all, the dominant culture uses the system to protect its own interests' (Williams 2004: 166).

However, what is whiteness? Whiteness studies is an outgrowth of CRT that scrutinizes the structural and moral consequences of whiteness and the idea of *white* as a race based around the concept that 'White people are "raced," just as men are "gendered" (Frankenberg 1993: 1). Here, I am only interested in critical theory and CRT inasmuch as they form the roots of whiteness studies. No full accounting of the impact of gender on culture can be taken by only examining the historically less dominant gender, and whiteness studies scholars such as Frankenberg (1993) argue that no full accounting of the impact of race on culture can be taken without also examining the dominant culture as a raced group. This notion has an especial effect on the social sciences because 'by thus erasing its presence, "whiteness" operates as the unacknowledged standard or norm against which all so-called "minorities" are

measured' (Keating 1995: 905). Yet, a discussion of the functionality of whiteness studies is useless without at least a working definition of what whiteness is.

Whiteness studies is the study of how white people's race shapes their lives. Presently, I will be using Frankenberg's work as a basis for departure and analysis for my foray into whiteness studies. In her writing, she argues that 'Whiteness… has a set of linked dimensions. First whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint," a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed' (1993: 1). My unique contribution to knowledge stems precisely from this 'unacknowledged standard' associated with Frankenberg's third point and noted by other scholars of whiteness (Keating 1995, Frye 2002, Bonnett 2008, Case 2012).

Whiteness is also 'delimited by the relations of racism at that moment and at that place' (Frankenberg 1993: 236). Frankenberg's definition of whiteness is modified by Keating (1995) to acknowledge that, while whiteness is strongly connected to white skin, it is a mutable phenomenon that can be withheld from those with light skin and granted to those without. While whiteness is a subjective experience and not a transhistorical truth, different expressions of whiteness, for example in England and the Southern United States, do maintain a shared historiography. This acknowledgment is similar to the socialist feminist idea of 'societies structured in dominance' (Hall 1980: 305) inasmuch as whiteness is a culturally embedded notion tied to power distribution in most Western societies. This embedded power can be seen as a direct outgrowth of the European colonial impulse (Spivak 1985: 247) and 'means that the Western self and the non-Western other are

constructed as discursive products, both of whose "realness" exists in extremely complex relationships with the production of knowledge' (Frankenberg 1993: 17).

However, this theoretical reasoning does not mean that the construction of whiteness itself is a straightforward topic, and this complexity is partly what perpetuates whiteness's status as an unacknowledged standard. Similarly, because the colonial dialogue is the process through which the 'Other' is created, as part of the flexibility characteristic of the subjective nature of racial identification, those groups that may at times fit under the whiteness category are excluded when otherized. This includes the post-colonial assertion that 'everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern' (Spivak via de Kock: 1995:45) and is refused access to equality. This is exacerbated by a linguistic code that creates an 'us-vs-them' binary, allowing the dominant culture to perceive the less dominant as deserving of subjectification (Saïd 2007). An example of this can be seen in how 'chav culture,' a culture of British white, working-class masculinities, is seen as other to the overarching white British narrative (Jones 2012). This process may be obfuscated however through the poetic shift in academic writing in the mid-twentieth century away from the use of the term *race* to the use of *ethnicity* (Omi 1986: 14–15). This systematic separation from the 'Other' ties the dominant culture into a hierarchy of power and dominance through a process that Giroux calls the process of securing 'power by refusing to identify [it]' (1992: 15). As Keating writes, 'the dominant culture's inability or reluctance to see it as such is the source of its hidden authority' (1995: 905). Due to this power dynamic, whiteness is left to function as a 'pseudouniversal category that hides its specific values, epistemology, and other attributes under the guise of a nonracialized, supposedly colorless, "human nature"'

(Keating 1995: 904). Post–World War notions of race have 'been defined by particular elites, both political and academic, in a manner that reflects their economic interests and cultural ethnocentrism' (Kinloch 1974: 26) in a way that defined the other while leaving whiteness unobserved and immune to scrutiny.

Extraction from the universalism of whiteness renders the objectified groups – Jews (Uhlmann, Brescoll, and Nachery 2010), Italians (Connell and Gardaphé 2010), Eastern Europeans (Ignatowicz 2012), the poor (Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin 2010), and so on – targets of discrimination, stereotyping, and otherizing and thus less white by comparison. This process can be actualized because 'we really don't know what "white" is' (Mercer 1991: 205). Still, as an academic researcher dealing with feminist literature, I must acknowledge that if whiteness is treated as a positivist universal category in my work, I fall into the same trap that I am accusing that very category of propagating – that is to say, I would be drawing on false generalizations in an attempt to universalize human experience. Partially addressing this issue, Keating acknowledges that '"white" skin and at least some of these "white" traits are often found together' (1995: 907). That is to say, white skin leading to whiteness is not actually a universal principle. Frye goes into further depth when she states 'the connection between whiteliness and light-colored skin is a contingent connection: this character could be manifested by persons who are not white; it can be absent in persons who are' (1992: 151–152). Phrased a different way, whiteness is a socially constructed expression of culturally spanning normativity backed by an entrenched and unexamined power imbalance. When groups are positioned as 'the other', by being too black, too poor, too religiously deviant from the accepted norms, or too anything at all, these groups are 'other' against a normative expression of whiteness.

For this reason, Frye prefers the term *whiteliness* to *whiteness*, because the term *whiteliness* to Frye more easily accommodates those who do not have white or light skin color that conforms to the social construct of whiteness and causes less confusion when discussing those that visually present as white skin but do not conform to the social construction of *whiteness*. However, while I acknowledge the point Frye is making, it ignores the systemic racial privilege that is inbuilt to the characterization of whiteness. Non-whites that buy into the whiteness model still cannot assume the mantle of white with regards to privilege unless they are also able to assume the appearance of white.

However, it would be inappropriate to give the impression that whiteness or whiteness studies is a universally accepted locus of discourse. Kenan Malik suggests that the anthropological tendency to state and define cultural boundaries while simultaneously naming internal divisors such as race as 'a particularist, relativist, and anti-humanist philosophy' (1996: 7), and quite frankly he is correct. Whiteness studies is not designed to satisfy the positivist yearnings of a researcher aligned with Enlightenment philosophy such as Malik. Whiteness studies is based in a subjectivist camp that holds firm to the notion that 'social groups possess different cultural characteristics which make them unique and distinct' (Malešević 2007: 2).

A more specific critique of whiteness studies may be found in the writings of Eric Arnesen. Arnesen presents perhaps one of the most well-reasoned critiques of whiteness studies, and by doing so inadvertently shows that the debate surrounding whiteness studies remains axiological, revolving around the value of the field's research and whether the field has a positive or negative impact on light-skinned peoples. For example, Arnesen agrees that 'racial identity in general, and white racial

identity in particular are tremendously important subjects deserving of the attention they have received and ought to receive in the future' (2001: 25). However, Arnesen also agrees with fellow whiteness studies critic David Stowe when the latter states that the field of whiteness studies 'risks dulling the historical imagination by obscuring the other equally important and generally more self-conscious categories – regional, familial, religious, occupational – through which people understand and situate themselves and others' (Stowe 1999: 1359). Still, this argument seems singularly odd to me. While acknowledging that the idea of a white race is important, it seems to imply that it is simply not important enough to bother studying. However, just as Asian studies does not preclude the examination of class and religion, whiteness studies does not replace other more traditional forms of examination; the study of whiteness simply adds a critical examination to vertices that already existed in the environment and remained unremarked if left unexamined.

Arnesen also accuses whiteness studies as a discipline of sloppy scholarship, stating that 'if whiteness is to endure as a critical concept, its scholars need to demonstrate that more than the historian's imagination or aspirations are involved. If they cannot, then it is time to retire whiteness for more precise historical categories and analytical tools' (2001: 26). However, this argument fundamentally ignores the critical theory and feminist roots from which whiteness studies is an outgrowth (Kolchin 2002). While Arnesen observers that

> whiteness is, variously, a metaphor for power, a proxy for racially distributed material benefits, a synonym for "white supremacy," an epistemological stance defined by power, a position of invisibility or ignorance, and a set of beliefs about racial 'Others'; and one self that can be rejected through "treason" to a racial category. For those seeking to interrogate the concept critically, it is nothing less than a moving target. (2001: 9)

He refuses to acknowledge the antipositivist theoretical tradition whiteness studies evolves from. While he calls for essentialized understandings of key concepts and theories (2001: 9), essentialist theory is not a part of the basic concepts constructing whiteness studies. Whiteness studies is not essentially anything; it is a multivalent area of discourse that examines an embedded system of power and unremarked assumptions based around race and culture. Moreover, herein lies my specific interest with this project. If whiteness is unremarked in traditional funeral-food studies, which I will show is the case, then when these remarked and coded groups of others are examined, the unremarked, unmentioned matrix they are subtlety being compared to is whiteness. By examining whiteness itself in the funeral-food context, these comparisons can be overt and add to the overarching academic dialog.

Exploring Privilege

The reason that the comparisons between 'the other' and the unremarked state of whiteness must be examined, and likewise the reason Arnesen's protests fall short of their mark, is tied to the idea of privilege – specifically white privilege. Privilege has little in common with, yet is often confused for, the colloquial understanding of having more beyond the standard of most, and instead, represents advantages that one group has inside of a social system in contrast to the disadvantages that another group experiences within the same social norm (Vang 2010). Privilege as a social concept refers not to specific privileges that an individual may or may not display, but to a systematic inequality embedded in power structures in a given society (Johnson 2006). This includes both the allowance of overt racism by the dominant group and also the covert, embedded biases in the social order (McIntosh 2001).

Frankenberg's definition of whiteness above displays whiteness studies' roots within critical race theory primarily because it does account for the concept and powers of privilege. This allowance for privilege evolves from the foundational notion that whiteness functions not only as an identity but also as a locus of value that is cultivated and protected and as such also functions as a form of property (Harris 1993). Considering whiteness as such gives a vocabulary to explain both the embedded cultural practices that function to protect whiteness and how whiteness can be bestowed upon and revoked from individuals and groups that adopt or deviate from the cultural norms and mores established by whiteness (Lipsitz 1998).

Taking the above disparate ideas and philosophies as foundational elements of my personal academic viewpoint and epistemology, to fully realize my academic philosophy, I must make sure the methods I choose to conduct my research allow for my specific positionality and reflexivity. I will again emphasize the idea of specific positionality, because as Salzman points out (2002), descriptors mean little if how they impact the researcher, audience, and research subjects are not explored and reflected upon. Likewise, my own positionality cannot be the only positioned stance outlined. I must allow my research participants as much opportunity to flag their own potential biases as well. Finally, because of its position as an unobserved, unexplored norm, I plan to make the examination of whiteness key to my data collection and interpretation.

Conceptualizing Family

Social research has a long history of attempting to conceptualize *family* as something other than a nuclear, biological unit. In the mid-twentieth century, Hess

and Handel (1959) introduced their concept of family worlds. Via family worlds, Hess and Handel argue that families are finite units when viewed as a mechanism for providing meaning, and as such, each family unit functions on a specific internal logic that, while it may influence how specific family members view and judge the outside world, only functions as an internal metric of reason.

Similarly, while the concept has been explored as a way to discuss families constructed through marriage and the creation of stepfamilies (Castrén and Widmer 2015), the theory of families of choice 'was framed as a form of political affirmation towards rights for homosexual ways of life' (McCarthy and Edwards 2010, 2012: 731), and attempted to make allowances for individuals to self-define what their family consisted of in such a way that non-biological relationships could still be considered family in the academic sense (Weston 1991, McCarthy and Edwards 2010, Edwards, McCarthy, and Gillies 2012). Whether self-defined or not, these ways of interpreting family focus on examining family as a collective unit.

On the other hand, the,re has been a shift away from trying to define family by what the family unit is or should be, so much so that scholars such as Jacqui Gabb and Elizabeth Silva have noted that '[s]ince the 1990s the use of the concept of family has been firmly and steadily challenged, in particular from feminist scholarship and work sensitized by reflections emerging from the cultural turn in the social sciences' (2011: 1). Stemming from the idea that previous attempts to define the concept of family were unable to cope with the evolving dynamics of the modern familial relationship, researchers attempted to discover the utility of family as a system and locus of analysis while still acknowledging the importance that individuals living in contemporary society place on the concept (Stacey 1996). With

the dynamic construction and reconstruction of family associated with contemporary family life, personal life-course narratives become increasingly import in determining how individuals perceive and interact with the concept of family (McLeod and Thomson 2009).

Connected to this movement, David Morgan (1996) introduced the concept of *family practices* in an attempt not to define families by what they are but instead to examine families based on what families do and what it means to do family. Morgan places the focus on this idea of family 'on doing, on action, or social action' (2011: n.p.). Perhaps more specifically, 'family practices consist of all of the ordinary, everyday actions that people do, insofar as they are intended to have some effect on another family member' (Cheal 2002: 12). By performing these actions, whatever they may be, the acting individual defines another individual or individuals as members of their family. Thus the practice of action and family membership become entangled in a cyclical relationship (Morgan 2011). This approach to analyzing family not only allows for a traditional, nuclear, heteronormative family, but also allows the researcher to include individuals in the discussion of family that the participants consider as such but would not meet a more traditional, biology- and marriage-based definition. While some have argued that by using the term *family* at all, Morgan's work does not escape the heteronormative boundaries that the author was attempting to allude (see Roseneil 2005), this rebuttal of Morgan's theory of family practices does not acknowledge the importance research participants themselves place on the concept and term of family, nor does any other term approach the gravitas that the notion of family holds in popular society.

Other scholars have built on Morgan's initial work in order to address key pieces of the family practices theory. Janet Finch's (2007) work uses Morgan's family practices in order to focus on and expand the concept of family actions, introducing the concept of displaying families. Using the displaying families concept to understand families, Dinch maintains Morgan's 'emphasis…on social actors creatively construct[ing] their own social world, which means an individual's understanding of "my family" is subject to change over time and is deeply rooted in individual biographies' (Finch 2007: 66). These acts, or as Finch refers to them, displays, are not only inwardly facing intended only to influence the actor's own family, but are also outwardly facing to such an extent that members of the actor's immediate family, extended family, and even wider community can know and acknowledge that the social actor is properly displaying family. This allows, in the constantly changing and adapting nature of modern family relationships, the individual players in an individual social actor's life to change without that individual necessarily having to consciously examine and redefine what the idea of 'my family' means to them (Williams 2004). A prime example of this can be seen in how an individual is added to a family unit after adoption (Jones and Hackett: 2011). Food, from meal displays to sharing food, can often be a major way through which family is displayed and others are marked as outsiders (van Eijk 2011).

Working in a different direction from Morgan's original work on family practices, Carol Smart argues that the notion of family retains a hegemonic power in academic discourse, and to combat that tendency, academics should instead adopt an ontology of personal lives in which an individual social actor is looked at as a nodal point in an extended social network where those closest to the original social actor,

whether that individual is considered a family or friend by any of the participants' family or friends, are emphasized (Smart 2007). Smart proposes this change in response to a trend she identifies: throughout its practice, social research as a whole has 'periodically tried to rid itself of the conceptual and political straightjacket that the concept of "the family" imposes…[and] it seems clear that in spite of these advances, the terminology of family (whether plural or not, chosen or not), and the other specifications of kinship or household, still prioritize biological connectedness and/or physical place' (2007: 6–7). While this argument does potentially lose or minimize the importance the research participants themselves place on the concept of family, Smart's attempt is not to engage directly with research participants. Instead, Smart presents an ontological argument through which she shows that researchers, even while attempting to avoid these tropes, still tend to privilege biology or cohabitation in discussions of family when the term family is explicitly used. By doing so, even when attempting to subvert heteronormative concepts of family, unwary researchers my instead be unintentionally shoring them up.

Smart's attempt to enlarge the perceptions on family used by researchers is a trend that has been picked up by others as well. Sasha Roseneil's (2004) work focuses on the importance of friends and friendship in situations where long-term care is needed and provided, and it illustrates how the focus on family in these situations reinforces a heteronormative dialectic in the policy community. Roseneil shows that while attempts may have been made to be more inclusive of non-normative family situations, during analysis, these intentions can be overlooked.

To combat the tendency of heteronormative focus illuminated by Smart, researchers have combined her work with Finch's concept of displaying family in

order to generate a more total examination of an individual's family life. By doing so researchers like Allison James and Penny Curtis work on family eating displays maintain Smart's fact that 'people's personal lives need always to be understood as embedded in particular social and cultural worlds, rather than a function of lone, autonomous individuals' (2010: 1163), while maintaining Finch's ability to examining how social actions are perceived both internally and externally and how that can impact interactions with the wider hegemonic society. In their work, they are able to show both how the deceased are still able to be considered a part of the family unit via display theory and how food events can act as an important geography of family display (2010: 1168).

While the majority of those participating in social research acknowledge that the ways of codifying a family have changed in the last few decades, this does not mean that family is itself less important (Gabb and Silva: 2011). To illustrate this point, Neil Gross (2005) has examined the shift in the importance of traditions both to and in the family. Gross identifies what he determines are two types of traditions: regulative and meaning-constitutive. In his paper, Gross classifies regulative traditions as actions that one must observe or face consequences of exclusion from the community, and meaning-constitutive traditions as those actions that construct personal meaning in an individual or group's life narrative that are passed from generation to generation. Gross examines the modern period and notes that while both colloquially and in scholarship a loss of tradition has been reported, this is incorrect. Instead, Gross proposes that contrary to a loss of tradition, many traditions have shifted from regulative to meaning-constitutive traditions. This focus is specifically important to my research here, as my focus on the cross-generational

exchange of funeral-food traditions places my work squarely in Gross's category of meaning-constitutive traditions.

Rites of Passage

Arnold van Gennep, in the opening chapter of his 1909 monograph, sets up a metaphor between human society and a house which forms a basis for his theory on rites of passages. In this construction, van Gennep likens human society to a house in the sense that humans form interconnected subgroups in the same way that a house is made up of several rooms. Van Gennep acknowledges that an individual may be a part of several subgroups at once, but some subgroups, such as adult and child, are mutually exclusive (1960: 1). Van Gennep argues that transitioning from one such group to another demands a rite of passage to renegotiate and codify the individual's progress and new position. This work is seminal to the understanding and interpretation of mortuary ritual in modern and contemporary social research.

While van Gennep is interested in multiple types of life passage rites in his work, Douglas Davies notes that the triadic form that van Gennep suggests is both obvious and influential in modern death studies (1997: 18). Another noted death studies scholar, Jenny Hockey notes that van Gennep pays extra consideration to 'the linkage between the different parts of a ritual and their relationship to a wider social context' (2002: 212). As will be shown in the next section of this chapter, this focus on linkage means that of van Gennep's three phases of a rite of passage, separation, transition, and incorporation [referred to by van Gennep primarily as *preliminal rites*, *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and *postliminal rites* (1960: 21)], the central liminal stage functionally becomes most important to scholars. Van Gennep notes himself

that when studying funeral rituals ‘one expects rites of separation to be their most prominent component… [however, in fact] transition rites have a duration and complexity sometimes so great that they must be granted a sort of autonomy’ (1960: 146). However, that vast majority of van Gennep’s focus during funeral rites is on the deceased. That being noted, he does make some comments about mourners that are more pertinent to this study. Van Gennep states that during a funerary rite, the mourners go through the same stages of a rite of passage alongside the deceased (1960: 147–148). Mourners are separated from their normal lives, given a singular status often marked by especial clothing and food choices, and then reincorporated into society bearing a new social status. This view of the mourner’s own rite is key to my analysis of my data aggregate.

Communitas

However, van Gennep’s work may be seminal to the study of rites of passage, but it does not signal the end the debate. In the 1960s and 70s, anthropologist Victor Turner utilized van Gennep’s work on rites of passages to develop his principle of communitas. Communitas, as a theory, is an outgrowth of the liminality stage of van Gennep’s rites of passage and highlights the importance of this portion of van Gennep’s noted stages a part of his definition of rites of passages. In his work, Turner noted three distinct types of communitas: spontaneous communitas (the ephemeral feeling of unity engendered extemporaneously vis-à-vis groupthink or ritual), normative communitas (communitas integrated into regular social systems), and ideological communitas (a theoretical expression of communitas that can only be applied to utopian social schema) (1969: 132).

Due to Turner's focus on symbolism with a firm grounding in structural-functionalism (Eriksen 2010:24), spontaneous communitas is most often treated with, and Edith Turner, Victor Turner's wife and research partner, acknowledges that this spontaneous communitas is the focus of Turner's work on liminality and rites of passage (E. Turner 2012:1). It is the uniqueness of every experience of spontaneous communitas that makes it important – the uniqueness of experience in the liminal state allows for social transience (Turner 1969: 137). Working with the Ndembu people of Zambia the Turners observed the complex rites of passages present in the tribe and 'developed a complex analysis of initiation rituals among the Ndembu of Zambia, showing both their functionally integrated aspects, their meaningful aspects for participants and their deeper symbolic significance' (Eriksen 2010: 24).

Turner maintains a particularly strong focus on Van Gennep's liminality phase, his 'betwixt and between', a period in which the individual or ritual cohort is 'structurally if not physically invisible in terms of his culture's standard definitions and classifications' (Turner 1974: 232). During this liminal phase, the individual does not conform to the expected norms of the social group and may be seen as dangerous and disruptive to the social whole (Garber 2008:271), but the advent and event of liminality is important to overall social health and cohesion because it is that very liminality that 'simultaneously function as permitting integration into society and give the participants a mystical experience of oneness with the spiritual world and with the "societal organism"' (Eriksen 2010: 146). Stemming from what Turner describes as 'the power of the weak' (1974: 234), those in deathcare or that have recently experience a loss 'are commonly avoided by some of their neighbors and

colleagues; however they may also discover unexpected privileges… in light of the force majeure of a death' (Small 2001: 120).

Especially pertinent to funerals is also the experience of 'however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties' (Turner 1969: 96) through which the 'communion of equal individuals' is formed and communitas is able to manifest. As such, Turner departs from Van Gennep in the notion that 'far from guarding against the threat of disorder, rites of passage allow access to basic and vital human connectedness' (Bailey 2012: 29). As such, liminality can be seen as a functional twin of play as both are times in which participants 'escape from social convention and [allows] the exploration of new possibilities' (Stevens 2007:74).

However, communitas is not a positivist function. While the voices of communitas are not monolithic, for example Lingis argues that 'we enter into community by understanding our material environment' (1994: 7), for Turner communitas exists as a state of 'intersubjective reflexivity…permutations and combinations of relationships between varying numbers of entities, and the flashing signals from clusters to clusters on different planes and levels' (Turner 1992: 107). Communitas is relational, and the ritual participant may be aware of the unique relational position created by the experience (Turner 2012: 220). This is connected to Esposito's notion that communitas 'is nothing other than the limit that separates and joins' (2010: 149). Communitas is not a place or a time but a notion or function through which meaning can be made.

Turner (1968) named these rituals surrounding death ‘rites of affliction,’ and while most of the research into rites of passage focus on moving out of childhood and ignore old age (Sokolovsky 2004), a solid amount of literature does exist around the transitions of surrounding death (Eriksen 2010: 147), and has mostly focused on these moments of shared equality via communitas where ‘people come together as equals’ (Littlewood 1993: 76). Green notes that ‘new death’ may cause problems to Americans, and for the same reasons the British, due to the fact that death is no longer fenced by a symbolic language and standardized by new ritual practices (2008: 52).

Conclusion

The ontological turn in research demands that a researcher acknowledge basal assumptions about the world that shapes the conducted research. This work gives a window into the narratives of the lived experiences of the research participants, while acknowledging their expertise in the details of their day-to-day lives — specific people in a specific time and place. It is the anthropological equivalent of an insect preserved in amber. As such, while greater trends can be pointed to and seen, there is no true attempt to make this project universally generalizable. My research participants speak for themselves and their experiences, and while that can be said to include their families, friends, neighbors, and extended community, I make no wider claims about global or even national human behavior. I also acknowledge that within my research area there are individuals and entire communities that do not conform to the norms I present here. Thus, what is presented here is a paradox. Data and discussions are presented as an ideal type in the Weberian tradition and in the

assertion that social science must be conducted in the abstract, while simultaneously an attempt has been made to be as specific as possible when giving criteria, so as to not misrepresent actual peoples living in the world and ignore minority groups (see Zaleski 2010).

While I consider this research genuine, I do not consider it *true* in any empirical sense. Instead, I present here my interpretation of narratives I influenced and helped construct (a concept and process I address in chapter 3), informed by the literature cited and my own positionality. This is thus a subjective process, and the primary merit of this exercise lies in the engagement with the academy and ongoing academic dialogues. I invite the reader to acknowledge that what I present here is my best understanding of my and my other participants' experiences, but to always question our motivations and underlying assumptions.

While reading the rest of this document, the intellectual stance created by combining the ontological turn and material-semiotic methods should be kept in mind. This stance has influenced not only my methods, methodology, and data analysis, but also my approach to the literature presented in the next chapters.

Material culture is important not only for understanding the data in the study, but also because it drove the design of the study itself. Because objects are so closely linked with memory, all interviews were conducted in places, suggested by the participants, that were associated with funeral food — church kitchens, private kitchens, dining rooms, community halls — and while handling objects, again suggested by the participants, that were associated with funeral food, such as cookware, food containers, foodstuff, flowers, and photographs.

Whiteness is patently invisible in both food and death studies. Current notions in both multidisciplinary fields may be recontextualized to offer a greater understanding of the phenomena and systems at hand by examining whiteness at the intersection of food and death. This is something I develop further in the next chapter, which deals more directly with food and death studies. Whiteness studies played a central role in my choice of informants during the interview phase of my research. Most anthropological studies around funeral food have centered around the other, defined in juxtaposition to an unexamined and homogenous normative ideal or experience. By focusing my project on the concerns of whiteness studies, this project will make strides in contextualizing most previous work on funeral food in social research.

Concepts of family come into play in this study because family is intricately bound up with funerals and funeral-food traditions in the American South. Using Finch's concept of family display, I examine what families feel their narratives of funeral-food traditions express both to themselves and to outsiders. While doing this, I strived to retain the reflexive focus offered by Smart's work by constantly reaffirming if I was privileging cohabitation or biological connection in my analysis on both individual and family narratives. Conceptualization of Family, Rites of Passages, and Communitas intermingle to form the basis of my approach to analysis. Much of the literature and language surrounding the discussion of mortuary rituals, including funeral-food traditions, are tied to positions and terms of kinship (see Tsintjilonis 2004, Course 2009, Long and Buehring 2014). By remaining aware of the complexities of contemporary family, and family-of-choice, life, a more robust view of mourner and mourner position can be seen. Likewise, the position that

mourners can be seen as participating in their own Rite of Passage that generates its own sense of communitas will be positions that flow throughout subsequent analysis.

Chapter 2
Backgrounds: Studies of Food, Funerals, and Death

Introduction

This study exists at the interstices of several fields of study. Therefore, to properly situate this study in the academic discourse, it is necessary to discuss the relevant literature from several areas of inquiry. To that end, this chapter gives an overview of the studies of food, funeral, and death in the academic literature. The first section delves deeply into studies of food and consumption, which are rather common in anthropological writing, but rarely so as the primary focus of any study. The second section addresses funerals themselves, in an attempt at showing how the greater network of death and bereavement traditions have shaped both the environment and the content of funeral-food gatherings. Lastly, the final section looks at the growing field of death studies. Each of these various foci provides a piece of the context that this study draws on to make sense of funeral-food traditions in Northwest Georgia. Likewise, this study not only draws these fields together, but also finds its place among them.

Plain White Bread: Food and Consumption Studies

Food is a common but usually secondary topic in anthropological research. Its status as a subfield makes presenting a concise contextualization for the current research cumbersome. To better organize the material, I have selected works that study food from within other relevant studies. The first segment of this section on food covers the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century beginnings of the

subfield through Margaret Mead's challenge in "The Changing Significance of Food" to address the problems of global hunger and food insecurity more directly. In the next segment, on food as an identity-creator, three authors emerge as important to my study: Borre (1991), who keeps food as a physical reality central in her work; Counihan (2009), whose life-history interview style is central to this study's design; and Holtzman (2009), whose suggests that bad cooking may be better than good cooking at creating memories. In a segment on funeral feasts, I cover theories from a variety of disciplines, including the social monitoring theory, the theory that the funeral feast maintained the social order of the community and station display, and the theory that funeral feasts are markers of status. It also investigates communities that hold traditional food and 'proper' funerals as important to community identity, in particular, African-American funeral feasts (Rosenblatt and Beverly 2005) which show how food can be simultaneously a piece of material culture storing memory and, through its consumption, a way to connect with the departed.

The next segment moves to arguments about consumption and race. It examines the mediated representation of funeral food provided by professional institutions in the funeral business, looking at instances of funeral consumption and branding alongside food consumption. Daily food consumption choices have been shown in the academic literature to have a profound impact on people, but little attention has been given to such consumption choices at times of emotional crisis.[2] Next, I discuss how studies of consumption use whiteness as an unacknowledged ideal but neglect to overtly address such 'normative whiteness.' This segment

[2] Perhaps the only exception to this statement is around the idea of eating disorders; see Anna Lavis's 2013 work as a prime example in this area. However, these studies focus on the connection between food, identity, and disease and not food and identity as a straight link.

addresses Jacqueline Thursby's *Funeral Festivals in America* in particular, because that book assumes a standard US funeral-food tradition that flows into a national funeral-food narrative modified by otherized Americans, including African-American and First-Nations peoples. By problematizing whiteness in the funeral-food context, I hope to inject greater rigor in the funeral-food debate. I also treat several notions involved in consumption studies in this section. In "Shifting Trends, Living Traditions," I address how combining the consumptions of food and materials surrounding a funeral, such as flowers, food, clothing, and items of personalization, creates a new and dynamic avenue of academic inquest. Lastly, I cover funeral industry trends towards packaging experiences in a highly-managed and -themed death practice and its creation of new pathways for transmitting funeral-food traditions.

A Brief History of Food Studies in Social Research

It would be technically correct but possibly misleading to name food as one of the oldest subfields in social research and anthropology specifically. While food has long been recognized as important in many social science disciplines, the study of food has not evolved far past a symbolist or structural-functional dialog. Food is discussed primarily in regards to its symbolic meaning to the social group that produces or consumes it (e.g., Shepler 2011, Zaman 2010, Tate 2010) or as a litmus test to measure another factor in the social group, such as poverty, insecurity, or identity (e.g., Dowler and O'Connor 2011, Zezza and Tasciotti 2010, Stiles 2008).

Food has been a longstanding topic in the evolution of anthropology. Garrick Mallery's 'Manners and Meals'[3] appears in the first volume of the journal *American Anthropologist*, published in 1888, and engages in short, comparative, ethnographic writing about the eating habits of Native Americans; historical aristocratic European dining habits; and a European- American upper-middle-class dinner party. Frank Cushing's early-twentieth-century monograph *Zuni Breadstuff* (1920) discusses the bread cycle of the Zuni from growth to consumption and how bread factors into the ritual life of the tribe. Cushing's monograph was followed shortly afterward by Franz Boas's *Ethnology of the Kwakiutl* (1921), in which Boas spends a chapter discussing salmon recipes and their importance to the Kwakiutl.

These particular works, while interesting, have, like many other works created during this era, lost much of their impact on anthropology as a whole. One of the most lasting impacts on the cultural study of food comes from Claude Levi-Strauss's attempt (1965), as influenced by Durkheim, at anthropological grand theory of food with his culinary triangle. Levi-Strauss (2008) attempts to apply structuralism via food using his culinary triangle to illustrate the most natural and cultural types of cooking and how these specific examples fit into the greater structure of the society of those cooking. Mary Douglas (1966) was also simultaneously examining food in respect to structuralist theory. Douglas's work, which was also heavily influenced by Durkheim, has a far more accessible tone and

[3] Many of the early works in this paper were originally discussed in Sidney Mintz and Christine Du Bois's joint paper 'The Anthropology of Food and Eating' (2002). I have used their work to guide me to some of the earliest and more important works in the Anthropology of Food, but I have only used this piece as a guide post and have worked to draw my own conclusions. I have also chosen to abandon their classification of food related articles for my own. Their instead divides the different ways that food functions, and my personal emphasis is on the overlooked fact that it is indeed a function of food and not the food itself in many cases that is being observed.

theory. Her monograph analyzing the Jewish dietary laws of Leviticus as symbolic rules of boundary-maintenance that set the proto-Jewish culture apart from bordering tribes,[4] and her paper (1972) analyzing her own family's food habits and the idea of what makes a meal to the middle class in England, tend to appear more often in current discussions on the cultural study of food. Douglas's and Levi-Strauss's work marks a shift towards foods being used as a discursive element of analysis. The sensory perceptions of the preparers and consumers are not highlighted, nor are recipes given.

No matter how great Levi-Strauss's and Douglas's influence on modern food studies, Jack Goody's publication of *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* marked a major watershed moment in the discipline. Goody's book became a forerunner of the trend of using food to analyze both theories and practices in social research. Goody (1982) presents a harsh critique of the lack of comparative or historical analysis in food research and addresses a sophisticated and multivalent question analyzing the lack of an *haute* cuisine tradition in African food customs and foodways, while also showing how industrial food production's replacement of culturally dominant foods impacts people in the Global South, food traditions, and identities. From this point, the study of food in the social research arena is seen as 'matured enough to serve as a vehicle for examining large and varied problems of theory and research methods' (Mintz and Du Bois:

[4] It is important to note, that in the 2002 revised edition of this work, Douglas retracted a major part of her earlier theory. In this later edition, she links the Jewish bodies with the Jewish altar and showed how the imbibing of non-sacrificial animals may inform the dietary laws more (2002). However, this itself can be said to be a symbolic boundary, and is still in line with Douglas's penchant to align herself with structural to structural-functionalist theory. The Jewish altar/body connection is also shown by Douglas to be connected to the traditional Jewish occupation of herdsman. However, this connection is not a succinctly argued as the majority of Douglas's work, and may be a more tenuous connection.

2002: 100). After this, food is seen as a positive mechanism to analyze other issues in various disciplines of social research. However, the reduction of food to this utilitarian methodological device has caused food to conversely lose its importance in academic analysis in favor of the concepts of application and relevance. This can be seen in much of Mintz's work (1985), in which he uses sugar to illustrate emerging economic and political value creation and connects food and cooking to the idea of personal agency (Mintz 1996). Likewise, one can see this treatment of food with Nancy Munn's work (1986) on the symbolic value creation linked with growing and consuming food and its connection to the kula shell trade in Papa New Guinea and David Sutton's work (2001) on food's connection with memory-creation and memory-retention amongst Greek islanders. However, with the slight exception of Sutton's[5], each of these analyses loses the central element — the study of the food itself. It may be argued that these monographs and ethnographies are more useful to the discipline for that loss, but returning to Boas's earlier study of Native American salmon recipes allows a later scholar, Helen Codere (1957), to examine how food itself adds to social organization and issues of precedence. Without basic academic rigor applied to the food itself being studied, future avenues of scholarship may be lost. Margaret Mead's sentiment in 'The Changing Significance of Food' (1970) is persuasive: with the awareness of the infrastructure that underpins global food trade and the ready evidence of global hunger and food insecurity, it may be indulgent to focus on cuisine and not how the developed world can help the underprivileged. However, this is a false dilemma. Academia has room for both lines of inquiry, and by avoiding the study of populations' qualitative experiences with food, valid

[5] Sutton concerns himself with his subjects' perception of the food, but does a poor job of dealing with the food itself.

avenues of inquest may be lost. After all, as with Codere's study, one may inform another. I hope that this study may fuse these two concepts and methods of social inquest.

The Literature of Food as Identity

Academic couple William and Yvonne Lockwood show how specific foodstuffs, such as milk products including cheeses and curds, help to construct the Finnish-American ethnic identity (2000b) and how specific cooking practices kept Arab-Americans from fully integrating into Midwestern society, thus preserving their ethnic identity (2000a). Likewise, Pat Caplan's work (1997) focuses on the creation of a moral identity as an individual in a collective as expressed by food and is differentiated by common social dividers such as race, class, and gender. Mary Weismantel's work in the Andes illustrates some methodological issues, such as consistent problems separating concepts such as race, class, and gender from each other when studying food; Weismantel (1988), however, manages to show how these problems, once acknowledged, add to a richer study. Helen M^{c}Beth's (1997) edited volume is a far more sociologically- and biologically-minded work that deals with the social construction of taste and how this concept impacts a social group.

This biosocial focus has found fairly strong purchase in food studies. Alan Goodman's volume, *Nutritional Anthropology* (2000), focuses on the interaction between diet and social eating. One of the best examples of this mixing is Kristen Borre's ethnographic research with the Clyde community of North-Baffin-Island Inuit. Borre not only analyzes the nutritional impact of the traditional Inuit diet on the Inuit body, but also shows how the diet helps to define Inuit culture and

generational differences. Because of that link, this text is important in my analysis. Likewise, in Borre's need to defend and explain to a Western audience Inuit practices such as drinking fresh seal blood with a tea cup or eating still-warm, raw organ meat, Borre (1991) gives an inclusive description of both the food of the Inuit and how it affects the social dynamic of the people, as well as their reactions to it, both positive and negative.

In the social anthropology field, Carole Counihan has consistently shown an understanding of the methodological importance of blending the study of specific foodstuffs with the exploration of the qualitative experiences and reactions that those foodstuffs elicit. Although I will expand on this in my methods chapter, I will be using Counihan's concept of narrative life-histories. Counihan (2002, 2004, 2009, 2012), both through her work as an independent writer and as an editor of readers and compiled volumes, focuses primarily on the construction of identity around food and the role of food in gender construction. Counihan's approach to food-based research allows for the discussion of topics such as gender and identity, while keeping the food itself at the center of her writing.

Counihan's first independent book, *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power* (1999), reads almost as a narrative, edited volume of one author's work. Drawing on over a decade of qualitative research, Counihan uses data collected from Sardinian peasants, middle-class Florentine homes, expectant American mothers, and American children from youth to university. In the volume, Counihan's focus noticeably shifts from foodways, the cultural, and social and economic practices surrounding the production and consumption of food in her early research to how the creation and consumption of food reflexively alter the perception

of self and how the ideas of self and gender are created through food. However, one of Counihan's strongest contributions is not using food as simply a symbol or mechanism, but remembering the materiality of the object that is shaped by the gendered nature of food production and consumption. Counihan even includes recipes in specific sections of the work. This inclusion within more standard academic writing means that Counihan is documenting practice, theory and the experiential, sensual nature of the food that she presents for the reader. This focus allows the reader to not only benefit from Counihan's conclusions but also share in the gathered data. Seeing these recipes allows the reader to contextualize the qualitative experience Counihan represents in her work.

Following her first book, Counihan's methods change slightly, and this allows her to be more systematic in her exploration of food's connection to gender. Counihan's second book, *Around the Tuscan Table: Food, Family, and Gender in Twentieth Century Florence*, explores the personal narratives of a specific Italian extended family's experiences with food. While Counihan does interview male informants, the focus is once again on women and their experience shaping their personal and collective identity by creating and consuming specific foods. Possibly because of her male informants, Counihan also explores how the onset of modernity has altered traditionally gendered relations and the rapid changes in Italian food culture pertaining to gender. Using a life-history interview style, in which she also notes the narrative ways topics originate in the informants' stories, Counihan looks at how male home-cooks change gender dynamics and, without compensating in other cultural arenas, displace women from a traditional position of expertise and power within the home. Within this context, Counihan shows, women are increasingly

isolated. Traditional foodways requiring collaboration between women and thus creating social networks fall away to be replaced with modern conveniences. Counihan, by using personal life stories that unfold as the informant sees fit and by analyzing the way and order in which they do so, presents an important window into a transitional point in Italian culture and displays adeptly how the introduction of modernity and a changing food landscape due to food's being more readily available can change the sociocultural dynamic of a community.

Food as Tradition

Jon Holtzman draws an interesting observation in one of his papers on Counihan's and Sutton's ideas: he analyzes the memory-creating potential of bad cooks. Holtzman claims that when Western writers focus on specific foods in food studies, they tend to focus on delicious, well-made food for research. Holtzman (2010) argues that poorly cooked and poorly prepared food has a better chance of creating memory due to the food's strong impact on the consumer's senses. To illustrate his point, Holtzman cites recent examples in food studies in which the researcher linked delicious food to the creation of memory, such as Judith Farquhar's study of Chinese sensuality (2002) and his work in Kenya (2009). However, I do not believe it is the rarified state of the bad cook that Holtzman actually illustrates; rather, Holtzman shows how bad cooking breaks a routine of better cooking, and that difference from the routine, in turn, creates a powerful memory.

Funerals are obviously a break in routine, and may function similarly to "bad cooking" in creating memories: the break in routine could be what makes specific dishes served in different American funeral traditions so memorable and iconic

(Thursby 2006). Death is almost by definition a disruption for those near it, and how it intersects with memory creation should be explored. Since the 1970s, the social study of food has shifted from an exploration of what the mysterious other can bring him or herself to eat and towards the use of food to examine greater social issues such as the construction of identity or political insecurity. This shift has positively influenced social research as a whole, especially anthropology, but in doing so, some of the richness of the social study of food may have been lost. Recently, scholars such as Counihan and Borre have generated a more integrated method which includes examining both the food and the impact that food has on a social construct. However, these researchers still hew towards the *why* of food and not the *how*. Likewise, Holtzman highlights this issue and links it to the overlooking of less-than-ideal food and food-preparation techniques. These observations are vital to the continuation of food studies; in the study of other subfields such as gender or even industry, social scientists do not shy away from the less ideal. In order to understand the role of food in memory making, a greater investigation into food is called for, and socio-food research must be broadened.

Funeral Feasts

Funeral feasts appear across the literature of a variety of disciplines and contexts. Scholars have paid considerable attention to the elaborate celebrations found throughout the Melanesian region (Weiner 1988) as well as among the Torajans and Sumbans of Indonesia (Adams 2004) due to the vastness of the ritual and socioeconomic burdens these traditions place on the living participants. The elaborate funeral feasts known as potlatches by the Native Americans of the

American Northwest have been studied as points of cultural identity and points of nexus of the local gift-giving culture (Beynon, Halpin, and Anderson 2000). Outside examinations of specific cultures, researchers have looked to funeral feasts to isolate and identify specific mindsets found in the host cultures that may explain other actions in the society. For example, in mid-twentieth-century ethnographic research and analysis, the theory that elaborate funeral-food expectations served as a way to keep other families in the community from hoarding limited resources and outstripping their neighbors and companions prevailed (Nash 1958, Carrasco 1961, Kirkby 1973: 31, Foster 1967: 123-124). This social monitoring theory was extended to include the dead's observations of the worthiness of the living for temporal blessings from the deceased (Bender 1985). Later, however, a more prevalent theory emerged holding the funeral feast most likely served to maintain the social order of the community, station display, and shame those who could not participate in the accepted norms of the prescribed traditions (Rosman and Rumbel 1971, Bender 1985).

Current scholarship around the phenomenon of funeral feasts tends to focus on the idea of funeral feasts as geographies of status. Scholars have studied populations in cultures and locations as diverse as Africa (Dietler and Herbich 2001), Indonesia (Adams 2004, Tsintjilonis 2007), New Guinea (Wiessner 2001), and Southeast Asia (Hayden 2003) as instances of cultures producing funeral feasts to mark, to various extents, the social importance of the deceased and their family.

Rosenblatt and Wallace (2005) have also examined the funeral feast in the African-American context, although it is not central to the overall theme of their work. They report frequent instances of their informants mentioning the after-funeral

meals as an important part of the funeral ritual for both the personal participants and as a community display. They also showed how the informants consider food both a piece of material culture that can hold memory and an instance in which an object can connect the participants to a lost loved one through its consumption. In essence, a traditional food embodies liminality. The object is without a specific time or place, due to its traditional status within the family and greater community, and because of this, contemporary consumption links the consumer through happy memory, production, and tradition to all who have consumed that dish and have significance to the consumer — not only those in the past who have consumed the dish and have significance to the consumer, but also those future decedents that will maintain the tradition. I will discuss the links between liminality and funeral food in greater depth in chapter 5.

Culturally specific foodways have also been explored in other American cultural contexts. The importance of food in the American Jewish tradition is a well-explored topic, but again, the funeral traditions are underrepresented in these explorations (Deutsch and Saks 2008). While food is addressed as an important manner of creating American Jewish cultural identity, this is not always linked to specific funerary practices (Gurock 2009). The links between food as a cultural marker and the funeral as a cultural marker have been explored in other communities as well, including the Muslim communities in the US and UK (Whinfrey-Koepping 2008), the Chinese American community (Fosha and Leatherman 2008), the Caribbean immigrant community in Britain (Olwig 2009), and the Ghanaian immigrant community in Canada (Mensah 2009). While these studies may mention both the importance of traditional food in identity formation and the importance of

'proper' funerals to community identity, the links between funeral traditions and funeral-food traditions remain mostly unexplored.

Consuming Funeral Feasts

The concept of consumption is often abstracted in the academy; for example, a fan's buy-in to the cultural marketing of a sporting brand (even outside of the purchase of any specialized kit) can be spoken of as a specialized geography of consumption. However, nothing in the discussion of consumption is more primal than the material culture surrounding and the ideology of food. The old adage may claim that as consumers 'we are what we eat,' but the 'what' of the statement only holds part of the puzzle. To that end, I plan to explore the idioms surrounding food consumption in the American funeral-food context. Looking at where and with whom consumption is situated in the literature, I will examine the mediated representation of funeral food provided by professional institutions that are also involved in other aspects of the funeral business. Therefore, I examine instances of funeral consumption and branding alongside food consumption in this analysis.

Consumption helps to create an environment in which both conscious and unconscious decisions embedded in the fabric of an individual's socialization construct both self- and place-identity (Warde 1994). More so, as Appadurai points out, consumption patterns expressed in and around an individual's body can help shape how that individual conceptualizes time and greater temporal rhythm. Furthermore, Appadurai claims, 'the small habits of consumption, typically daily food habits, can perform a percussive role in organizing large-scale consumption patterns' (1993:13). However, in an academic climate where food consumption

choices have been shown to impact an individual's social body as well as that individual's perceptions of his or her daily life and environment, little attention has been given to such consumption choices at times of emotional crisis. If consumption patterns, as Bourdieu claims (1984), can be seen as a marker of social position, what does consumption in times of extreme, personal, emotional crisis say about the social mores of the observed consumer? The academic study of food consumption patterns allows the observer an insight into myriad social factors (Beardsworth and Keil 1990). Perhaps more than any other single vector of consumption, 'food is a most instructive critical case study' (Warde 1997: 22). For this study, however, I limit my observations to the ways the body and food interact to help create and maintain identity. I refine my study in this manner for two reasons: first, because a comprehensive overview of all avenues of food consumption patterns pertaining to funeral food cannot be all-inclusive, even in a thesis-length work, and, second, because so little academic attention has been given to funeral food's impact on individual and family identity.

Comparative Consumption

American anthropologist Sidney Mintz (1996) claims that there is not a specifically American cuisine and that American food is simply derivative of earlier native and immigrant cultures. However, this view may be too simplistic to be of use when speaking of food's ability to create an American identity. Mintz himself shares anecdotes of students who have viscerally negative reactions to this claim. While it is true that American staples, such as the iconic apple pie and hamburger, can be traced to foodways of earlier immigrants, American culinary culture can be seen as a

process-based cuisine in which otherized foods are made palatable to a population dominated by divergent backgrounds and thus different palates (Pillsbury 1998). Even without a specific, iconic dish, identity can be seen in food choices and preferences. One need only to look at the difference between American *lasagna* and British *lasagne* recipes, from the differences in spelling to the British use of a béchamel sauce as opposed to the American favoring of ricotta cheese, to see that even when adapting foreign dishes for domestic taste preferences, cultural variation abounds. Bell and Valentine point out that 'a familiar meal in unfamiliar settings helps fight off the panics of disorientation' (1997: 9). So, in a sense, consuming the familiar in times of crisis helps to remind the individual who he or she essentially is by his or her own definition of what is essential. This constructed identity creation can be very specific as well: the individual may identify along lines not simply of national identity but of other, more specific factors as well.

However, what is most interesting for my research is how none of the above examples explore or overtly display or treat with a normative expression of whiteness. As mentioned in my methods chapter, whiteness serves as an unacknowledged ideal and comparison. So when the adoption of Christian rites is noted to also adapt to the local, indigenous need for a major funeral feast in a region, what is left unacknowledged and thus unobserved is the fact that it is the white, ethno-European norm that this new tradition is noted as differing from (Hooghe, Reeskens, and Dietiled 2007, Letsosa 2010). Likewise, as ethnicity itself 'is not founded on any credible, biologically differentiated "races" [, e]thnicity, like gender, is a socially constructed resource based on religion, language and nationality' (Field, Hockey, and Small 1997: 12). Because race and ethnicity are socially-constructed

and -defined categories rather than objective truths, an individual might be considered a member of a particular racial category in one instance but not in another. This is a particularly easy process with whiteness because of its unobserved and unreflected-upon nature (Hobson 2008). Thus, for instance, when the funeral practices of white Catholics are observed and otherized by comparing them to an unacknowledged non-Catholic norm of whiteness, the covert comparison renders the subjects of the study less white (e.g., Quartier 2007). In other words, whiteness is neither an ethnicity nor a race; rather, it is a positing of a hegemonic social norm. I hope to use this study as an opportunity to problematize the unreflected-upon and unobserved nature of whiteness in these funeral-food processes and in social sciences in general.

Food's visibility as a point of cultural consumption makes it a prominent arena in which to investigate the processes involved in granting the label of whiteness to and removing the label of whiteness from individuals and target groups. As such it also becomes visible in its absence. As whiteness studies, when looking at the totality of the interdisciplinary field of research, tends to take 'as its subject the historical development and contemporary nature of white skin privilege' (Wray 2006: 3), food is able to become a mediating factor through which these cultural engagements and translations happen. These food-based definitions of propriety otherize marginalized whites in a variety of ways. Food, and specifically the American preference for sweet corn over wheat or oats, has even shown up as a marker separating Americanism from Britishness (McWilliams 2003). Non-normative whites were considered anything from members of other races to living relics in the form of contemporary ancestors (Frost 1899, Engelhardt 2011). Genteel

white cultural reformers, when working with white American poor, used food in a process that vilified immigrant culture, non-homogenized traditional practices, and regional variance in favor of foodways from the New England area that were seen as both more white and more wholesome (Levenstein 1988, Shapiro 2001). Because of this process, nonconforming whites went through an othering process. This process of marginalizing non-normative whites and re-racing them has deep roots going back to America's shared history with England (Jordan and Walsh 2008). The Irish, whose decedents are now considered a major part of white culture and whiteness in The United States, were considered so different from English whites that they were considered 'nigger[s] turned inside out' (Hoffman 1992: 25) and understood to be so removed from their English neighbors they were their own race (Ignatiev 1995).

Just as food was a link to immigrant culture that allowed someone with a fair complexion to be excluded from the mantle of whiteness, so too can food show the shift in an individual's status from nonwhite or less white to fully white. If an individual abandons traditions linked with the element that situationally makes them nonwhite, the individual can shift to a more fully white status, although they may not be able to escape from their nonwhite roots (Engelhardt 2011: 58). This is a function of overall white privilege and is a process that can never be fully undertaken by peoples of color. In other words, skin color and other physical features of ethnicity impact one's degree of whiteness, though they do not define it entirely. Wray advocates referring to white and whiteness 'as a social category, not a racial category' (2006: 139) due to the fact that some people may qualify in some ways, especially through skin color, and yet be excluded through other criteria. Others argue that the fluidity of whiteness is a matter not of race but of class (Roediger

1991, Omi and Winant 1994, Winant 1994), but this oversimplifies the issue and tends to disregard the interconnectedness found in privilege research. I do not suggest that race is a more important measure to examine these issues; rather, I suggest that race is just as important a metric as class or religion and has been underrepresented in the context of normative white populations. To do this there is an imperative to 'focus on how white majorities are made…through successful attempts to control and define multiple boundaries of social difference' (Wray 2006: 139).

Perhaps the greatest work on funeral food, at least in the American context, is Jacqueline Thursby's *Funeral Festivals in America*. Thursby addresses the American and English people's shared history and funeral-food tradition, and she is quick to set a convention in the book in which 'elaborate preparations for the funeral feast are generally no longer practiced ([because] we have restaurants and caterers today)' (2006: 5). She then describes mostly food cultures such as Southern, African-American, and First-Nation that eschew the catered norm she suggests 'we' have. Who does that leave as the 'we' that Thursby speaks of? Her subheadings, such as 'African American Dying in the United States' (2006: 52) and 'A Jewish way of Death' (2006: 56) set these ethnic groups as different without ever having a section on white deathways in America. Thursby's work sets up a convention by which The United States as a whole and especially American regions have standard funeral-food traditions that flow into a national funeral-food narrative which is then modified by otherized outsiders. African-American and First-Nation indigenous traditions are held in contrast to the 'American' norm presented by Thursby. However, as Thursby herself shows, these are not American norms. What Thursby actually discusses are

white American norms that are held in contrast to other legitimate American norms. Whiteness as an unobserved norm in this context results in these otherized groups appearing not less white but less American. Whiteness can be a strong unifying factor because of this process and its expression of privilege. Normative expressions of whiteness unite those who can be considered normative white more strongly than gender divides them (Kaplan 1998), and yet, examples such as this where it acts as an unnamed norm remove the ability lauded in social research to compare like for like. If the silent norm these otherized studies are being compared with is at least in part whiteness, what new insights can we discover by making an overt accounting of a phenomenon that is often left uncoded?

Hodgson and Bruhn (1993) survey the notion of 'geographical product factors,' as utilized by advertisers and vendors, which is intended to create authenticity and align a product with specific regional or exotic cultural identity. This can be taken even further by examining Robert Sack's (1992) definition of community, place, and consumption. While the sentiment of his work is questionable and does not reflect my own views on the subject[6], by focusing on place and consumption, his work has an added relevance to my research. Sack defines community as a place where 'particular systems of production, consumption, and other social relationships overlap' (1992: 188). Likewise, while consumer studies have traditionally had a very narrow definition of the family unit (Commuri and Gentry 2000), families are still seen as the central element in how the individual learns to be a consumer (Moore, Wilke, and Lutz 2002). Because of this definition, perhaps it would be better to define a *family* as an especial community instead of a

[6] Sack's work privileges in person interaction to such an extent that it perhaps skews his work.

unique entity, in order to avoid appearing ignorant of the 'complex intra-familial processes which in practice directly affect consumption… [and that are] necessary to understand decision making processes within the family if one is fully to understand how the home functions as a consumption "site"' (Campbell 1995: 105). Douglas (1979, 1984) shows that the family's consumption of what they consider a proper meal together reinforces their shared bonds while simultaneously defining who can be considered as outsiders. Marjorie DeVault goes on to add that a proper meal is one in which 'part of the intention behind producing [it] is to produce "home" and "family"' (1997: 79). Charles and Kerr (1988) identify a proper meal as one that involves 'good food,' and that must be 'fresh' and 'natural' and that is usually hot instead of cold. What does this mean in the American funeral-food context?

Consumption of Death

The above studies, however, do not take funerals into account; for these studies, funerals are not normative expressions of consumption, of food or anything else. Consumption at and around a funeral takes place at a time of need, and at-need consumers are often taken through procedures that have been routinized by the provider and thus pose moments when the consumer is at reduced agency (Clark and Szmigin 2003). Once an individual has been informed of the death of a loved one, the bereaved tends to feel in a rush to make important decisions while simultaneously losing interest in making comparative or discriminating decision-making efforts (Smith 1997). This leads to a geography of consumption in which the choices of funeral food, provided by professional entities, reinforce the community's social convictions about what is appropriate, in the same way that Žižek (1989) shows

laugh tracks alongside telemediated images reinforce conventional ideas of humor. As laugh tracks alert the audience to what is appropriate humor, in a similar fashion, the food choices suggested by professional funeral-food providers highlight what could be deemed appropriate funeral foods. This reinforcement critically challenges the agency that families previously had, before the consumption of funeral food transferred into a public arena influenced by death-care professionals. This loss of agency occurs in an environment where individuals increasingly recognize the commercialization of funeral rites and are conflicted about their feelings about it and participation in it (Wernick 1995). Even though continued identity is challenged during times of social transition (Noble and Walker 1997), Bolea (2000) shows how those challenges allow greater salience to the family consumption process. This may, on the surface, seem out of touch with how the funeral industry is becoming highly customizable to the extent that 'almost half…are keen for their funeral to reflect their favorite hobby, colour, football team or music' (Funeral Service Journal 2011: n.p.). However, as Sanders (2012) points out, Johnsen's work on interpassivity — 'the act of leaving it to someone or something else to externalize emotions' (Johnsen, Muhr, and Pedersen 2009: 206) — applies here. Because the 'expressive equipment furnished by the funeral provider (e.g., casket, chapel, musical accompaniment) is, to some degree, a proxy for the emotive intent of the survivor' (Sanders 2012: 265), instances of interpassivity in the funeral and bereavement context can be expressed. This act of purchasing specific items for a funeral can be seen as a physical representation of the deceased's emotional impact on the bereaved, or, as Illouz says, 'they should be viewed as nodal points around which converge a multiplicity of relationships between self and others' (2009: 388).

Shifting Trends, Living Traditions

Combining these two types of consumption, of food and materials surrounding a funeral, creates a new and dynamic avenue of academic inquest. The provision of food by specialized funeral professionals is a relatively new phenomenon. While catering itself may not be new or unique to the modern funeral experience, a catered funeral experience that is provided by and perhaps even packaged with other funeral expressive equipment changes the social and increasingly physical landscape of post-funeral food consumption. As an example from a comparative demographic, according to the *Cost of Dying Special Report* at the University of Bath, the average funeral in the United Kingdom today costs £3,091 and tends to take place between seven and ten days after the death (Sunlife Direct 2012). At the same time, 52% of funeral professionals observe that bereaved families are increasingly unable to cover rising funeral costs, and 51% observe an increase in the bereaved's unwillingness to cover the financial burden created by the death of a close family member. The report also finds that inability to provide a socially appropriate funeral without any public funds acts as a point of stigma for the recently bereaved (ibid.: 15-17). The funeral acts as an important marker of the deceased's life, the love that the bereaved have for the dead, and the social importance and status of the remaining family; and social convention in the UK dictates that this usually includes money not usually factored into funerary budgets, but that may be substantial — money not limited to, but including, money for funeral food. If a social stigma engendering guilt in the bereaved for not providing the deceased with a 'proper' or 'nice' funeral, in the traditional social context, exists, then it is reasonable to believe this stigma extends to the parts of the funeral, grief,

and mourning process I refer to as *incidental costs* — items such as flowers, food, clothing for both the deceased and the mourners, and items of personalization for the ceremony — as these features are often pointed to as specific points of consumption in describing the 'niceness' of the funeral ritual (Holloway, et al. 2013a).

Amidst these rising funeral costs, and in an environment where funerals in many Western societies are trending toward a more secular (Quartier 2009), personalized (Ramshaw 2010), consumer-driven (Foster and Woodthorpe 2013) ritual than existed in the previous generation, these points of incidental costs remain the few parts of the funeral process unmediated by a funeral professional. Thus, they can act as cultural markers in ways that other aspects of the funeral process cannot. Perhaps none of these markers act in this way more so than the funeral tea. The bereaved, without any professional direction, decide how the tea will manifest. This expression of agency renders the funeral tea a unique point in the British funeral and postmortem process, but little academic attention has been paid to this specific ritual element, partly because of the difficulty of gaining access to and performing research in this environment (Holloway, et al. 2013b). Once this exercise of agency is performed, then the bereaved may receive professional guidance if they choose to employ a professional such as a caterer, but the importance remains in the fact that the bereaved do not receive professional death-care guidance in choosing between employing a caterer, renting a pub's or hotel's function-room, or having the funeral tea in the home.[7]

[7] This is an idea that may need to be explored in greater depth in my fieldwork. There are early indications in some of my pilot research that there may be some inconsistent guidance by funeral professionals in this decision-making process.

Little attention has been paid to funeral food in an 'average' British or American context. Sheila Harper (2008), in her doctoral thesis, mentions the ever-present nature of food, from cups of bitter coffee and tea to the appropriateness of displaying food at an American viewing, but food always remains ancillary to Harper's main point. Tara Bailey (2012) expands on Harper's point in her own treatment of the funeral tea, showing that while the post-funeral meal in the American context may be seen as a positive assembly, in the British context the funeral tea remains a period of awkwardness. Yoder's research (1986) on funeral food in the United States in the 1980s links food to a coming together of community and to a gateway point that ends the liminal period of abnormality; he casts the funeral-food experience as extremely positive for both the individual and the community as a time of coming together and social cohesion.

However, scholars reinforce the notion that, unlike in the United States, the British funeral-food custom of the funeral tea remains a time of systematic isolation. Holloway mentions how the logistical concerns of the funeral tea can act as a geography of unexpected stresses for the recently bereaved (Holloway 2013a: 76-77). Naylor (1989) shows a similar trend, remarking that whom to invite can act as a point of confusion and stress for the bereaved. Walter (2009) also notes this issue and the experience of isolation, but shows how the experience can be changed by inverting the ritual, so that food is served before rather than after the funeral service, and by allowing the mourning cohort to form social cohesion. It is possible, then, that the American post-funeral meal reinforces the continuation of community while the British funeral tea serves as a moment to acknowledge the ending of a specific social

network after the removal of a potentially central individual. Whatever the case, the post-funeral food experience remains an important, under-observed point of research.

In comparison, the transition towards funeral professionals is centered around the professional points of contact already established in both the United States and England. In the States, a new initiative, entitled Sympathy Food, is gaining contacts in funeral homes and parlors predominantly across the South. At the Storke Funeral home, in Bowling Green, Virginia, funeral director David Stroke created the company Sympathy Food to offer an alternative, professionalized bereavement gift for his customers. Expanding on the idea that 'it has long been tradition to bring food to a grieving family as a sympathy gift but, because of distance or busy schedules, that's not always possible' (https://www.sympathyfood.com/), Sympathy Food seeks to offer its customers a traditional grief experience in a unique format. Yet even with this perhaps noble goal, Sympathy Food suffers from a process by which it seems to offer an abundance of choice while simultaneously imposing limitations on a family's or an individual's preferred expression of grief. Contrary to the 'family favorites like delicious smoked ham, beef brisket, pot roast, prime rib, and much more' that Sympathy Foods advertised in American funeral trade publications when the business first opened, the food selection has merged with its two cognate brands, Get Well Meal and The Meal Stork, to offer dishes outside of those traditionally served at American funerals—especially in the South where the business is predominantly located. Dishes like Sweet Green Curry Chicken and Beef Burgundy all but drown out the only meal that still 'features down home cooking,' the Meatloaf with Sauce; incidentally, this meal plan is one of the most expensive on the menu, and specific side choices, like the Tomato Florentine Soup, excludes the dish

package from being a fully-realized regionally traditional offering. Southerners who want such a traditional, regional experience are reduced to paying for this single option. Surrounding the food package options are testimonials from 'satisfied customers' like 'Rebecca G' who describes Sympathy Food's offerings as being 'most appreciated' instead of her being 'inundated with flowers' (https://www.sympathyfood.com/). Sympathy Food also advertises that any funeral home that becomes an affiliate and advertises on their own website can earn up to 10% on each order placed through their own web site. This incentivizes the promotion of the 'traditional' option as expensive in a region of the country reputed for its conservative and traditionalist leanings. This illustrates a native understanding of the importance of traditional funeral food in the South. As such, during my study, I may be able to explore how new pathways for transmitting these funeral-food traditions are emerging.

In England however, the trend seems less about creating unique purchasing opportunities and more about capitalizing on those already culturally present and rebranding the service of funeral food as something under the auspices of a professional funeral provider. Making the most of the English tradition of convenience of some families to have a catered meal after a funeral service, several cafes attached to crematoriums have recently opened. Unlike Sympathy Food, which is a single company that franchises into several markets, these cafes seem to act as cottage industries running in support of the crematoriums to which they are attached. For example, Hearts and Flowers Café has operated as a part of the Stafford Crematorium since 2011. Transporting the post-funeral meal from the traditional pubs, hired halls, and hotels of the British catered funeral meal, the café at the

location of mourning literally removes a liminal period of travel for the bereaved in the grief process. Utilizing a language of convenience instead of a language citing tradition, Hearts and Flowers offers post-funeral buffets by price point only. Specific foods are not even mentioned on the menu; Hearts and Flowers enforces a social standard with its language by expecting the descriptive phrase of *a funeral buffet* to be enough information for the bereaved about their food choices. Like Sympathy Food, this is juxtaposed against catering offered for joyous occasions, whose descriptions describe a wide range of foodstuffs (heartsandflowerscafe.co.uk).

The Sandwell Valley Crematorium in West Bromwich has offered food and beverages in its Courtyard Café since 2011. The café boasts that '[m]ourners can get hot and cold drinks, sandwiches, jacket potatoes, pies, pasties, toasties and cakes at the café' (Nguyen 2011). More attention is paid here to offering specific food items, but specificity is again for convenience. On the business's opening, a local politician stated 'Bereavement is never an easy time, so hopefully the new Courtyard Café will be somewhere people can go to relax and make the experience a little easier. It looks really nice and I'd urge people to pop in' (ibid.). The emphasis here is on the individual consumer experience. Nowhere in the language is the family or community, or for that matter the recently deceased, present. The individual is left alone in his or her mourning. If this is typical of the English experience, then the comparison with the funeral-food expression displayed in the American South will be particularly adept at problematizing the pseudo-universality of the whiteness experience. These examples may exist as individual instances of individual providers trying to diversify in a highly fragmented funeral-care market (Banks 1998), or they may serve as a marker of Wallerstein's 'ongoing commodification of everything'

(1998: x) as the funeral industry trends towards packaging experiences in a highly-managed and -themed death practice (Sanders 2008).

Tastes of the Grave: Death Studies

While the previous section explored the academic writings on funeral-food traditions, this section addresses funerals themselves in an effort to both explain the environment of and contextualize the practices surrounding funeral-food traditions in the American South. This is not an attempt at giving a full accounting of funeral traditions, but is only an attempt at showing how the greater network of death and bereavement traditions have shaped both the environment and the content of funeral-food gatherings. To do so this section will set out a definition of both what constitutes a *funeral* and *funeral tradition*, current funeral expectations for attendees in the fieldwork location, how funerals have been addressed in social research, and show how the difference in traditions and language surrounding funeral traditions in the fieldwork location alter perceptions of what is normative. Like the previous section on food, the literature will not be presented in isolation. Instead, the literature review will be presented in conjunction with an ongoing discussion of the material in an attempt to create a more integrated and synthesized whole.

Defining the Funeral

Most often, the funeral is accepted as a multivalent, ritualized social event that serves both multitudinous and shifting human needs (Bailey 2014, Collins and Doolittle 2006, Emke 2002). But what meaning does that statement convey? For the individual attendee, the funeral may be a place to express grief and to acknowledge

the bereaved's association with the dead (Harrawood, White and Benshoff 2008) and socially it can be about the affirmation of the continuation of social bonds amongst those that remain (Klass, Silverman, and Nickman 2014). Still, how does this differentiate funerals from other rites involving the dead?

In acknowledging the importance of the social customs surrounding death, Glenys Caswell states that '[t]he practices that humans use to deal with their dead are intrinsically interesting,' (2009: 15) and this is likely true at least to the extent that they are of interest. To the Western mind at least, biological death is almost universally acknowledged as the ultimate outcome of life, and as such every living person is a stakeholder in the discussion of death. However, not all customs that people use to deal with their dead are funerary. The laying of poppies on Remembrance Day in Britain is a custom, still dealing with the dead, of memorialization instead of a funerary tradition (Marshall 2004, Newall 1976, Rigney 2008). Similarly, the Buddhist tradition of self-mummification may be viewed through the lens of a tradition of dying instead of as a funerary, or perhaps more aptly exclusively as, a funerary tradition (Gildow and Bingenheimer 2002, Hori 1962, Jeremiah 2010). Because not all rituals and customs pertaining to the dead can be considered *funeral* or *funerary ritual*, some consensus about the application of the term must be reached. This becomes especially important for this research as the term *funeral* may be applied differently in separate locations adding ambiguity and confusion to cross cultural comparisons, as will be illustrated below.

Eriksen states that '[t]he mortuary rite marks the last important rite of passage in the life of any human being' (2010: 147). However, this statement is problematic. While simultaneously suggesting that a mortuary rite is a singular event and not

acknowledging the potential for a series of events, Eriksen's definition allows no room for meaningful postmortem social lives of the dead as can be permissible under a material-semiotic approach.

Conversely, Fontana and Keene do not offer a concise definition of funeral, but instead explain that their chapter on funeral practices shows 'how we [Americans], dispose of the body, why we follow certain customs and procedures, and why we choose specific ways to be buried' (2009: 67). If we the reader are to interpret this as Fontana and Keene's working definition of funeral and funeral practices, must we accept these factors as the practices and concerns that separate funeral rituals from other social customs surrounding the dead? In her work with the remaining family of individuals that are considered missing, Pauline Boss (2002) gives an example of a funeral where a beloved guitar was substituted for the body of a missing individual so the family could experience the resolution of the funeral ritual. In this example, absolutely any disposal that took place was symbolic for the family in question. Equally, it is generally accepted that the modern funeral in the Western identified world is undergoing an ongoing process of individualization and personalization through which traditional customs and procedures, up to and including means of disposal, are being subverted in favor of emotive, differentiated, remembrance ceremonies (Driskill 2013, Gibbs, Martin, et al. 2014, Sanders 2012). In such an environment, traditional customs and practices and their motivations may not only be absent, but they may also be specifically avoided.

Taking a more grounded theory approach, Rosenblatt and Wallace (2005) again offer no specific definition of funeral, but instead, they allow their research participants to discuss funerals freely, and from there a sort of ideal type of funeral

emerges. The American funerals Rosenblatt and Wallace illustrate include both visitations and wakes [terms that will be explained and expanded later in this section] with the exception of a single case study — that of a stillborn child. Werner-Lin and Moro's work has shown that the lack of a body and surrounding ceremony after stillbirths, miscarriages, and abortions can hinder the grieving process of the remaining family and social group (Werner-Lin and Moro 2004, see also Betz and Thorngern 2006, O'Leary et al. 2011). However, like with Fontana and Keene's treatment of *funeral*, traditional sections and rites cannot be used to define the current, overarching concept. Instead, Rosenblatt and Wallace highlight a subjective feeling of funeralness in the interviews they had conducted. Rosenblatt and Wallace pull out of their interviews the emphasis on creating a 'nice' funeral via family and community support, honoring the dead, and displaying social status and affection. This is supported by Boss's work (2002) which claims that the modern funeral, especially one with a present cadaver, allows those present to begin the grieving process and paradoxically the physical presence begins the process of letting go by providing certainty of the change of status from living to dead of the decedent.

Still, this does not create a working definition of *funeral* usable for this project. Drawing on these sources, I propose a definition, not of a universal concept of funeral, but instead of the modern Western funeral — that in and of itself an ambiguous and multitudinous concept. As such, for the duration of this thesis, when referring to a funeral I will be referring to a social construct at which those assembled feel that the station and identity of funeral are being performed. More specifically, the funeral will refer to public and semi-public actions and settings taking place from the time of an individual's death until the point where those

participating in the social action agree the social action has ended or been fulfilled. This may be either continuous or punctuated and may be of different durations for different participants — making this a social setting that may be opted into and out of in a process partially dictated by the individual mourner's will and partially dictated by social construct.

It is also important to acknowledge that the locations and categories of funerals are commonly socially constructed. Like Rosenblatt and Wallace's research participants, my American interviewees simultaneously used culturally specific words and terms like *visitation*, *the friends and family*, *graveside*, *service*, and *wake* to both describe parts of the funeral and also used the term funeral as a shorthand for any of these specific social gatherings. This knowledge of funeral practices and parts was shared across my American participants and casually used by all of them. However, if one of my British colleagues had been present as an observer they most likely would not have known that they were at a social event referred to as *the friends and family* or that it would be considered part of the overall funeral by those local attendees present.

Definition of a Funeral Tradition

As seen in Elaine Ramshaw's writing (2010), funerals, memorial services, commemoration events, and the like can all be categorized as postmortem rituals. However, as discussed above, just as how not all of these events can be considered funerals, so to can an increasing amount of practices performed and displayed at these postmortem events, up to and including funerals, not be considered traditions. Reflecting the shift in the Western cultures towards secular, individualized, and

unique funerals, many practices surrounding specific funerals are designed and engaged with, not as traditional religious, community, or familial practices, but instead as unique expressions of the personalities of the deceased, the mourners, relational processes, or some social matrix therein (Klaassens and Groote 2014, Holloway et al. 2013, Caswell 2011). For example, while the release of balloons to coincide with a child's funeral may be seen as highly emotive, appropriate to the situation, and may be performed in a ritualized manner, it cannot be said to be a traditional practice for any involved (Pearson 2013). However, that does not mean that such an observation does not have the potential to become traditional. Drawing on Eric Hobsbawm's work, traditions can be established fairly rapidly, however, for a practice to be a tradition in must be recurrent, expected, and categorized to 'mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual and symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past' (2012: 1). As such, a funeral tradition can be seen as a practice or ritual, with explicit or implied connections to the past, enacted during the funeral period, which teaches, highlights, or expresses values deemed important to the group or community participating in the funeral. Thus, while practices such as the release of balloons at a child's funeral are seen as unique or novel they would not be categorized as traditional, if the same group were to develop a habit of releasing balloons at children's funerals, or even a subset of children's funerals, to illustrate a point important to that group, at that point it should be viewed as a tradition.

Primary, Wider, and Support Mourners

Participation in a funeral is truly a community affair. Because of the public death notice being printed in the local paper, alongside the untraceable passing of information via personal social networks, solid estimates of who or how many people will show up to any one aspect of the funeral are problematic. Likewise, because of the way individuals drift in and out of the specific social rituals and may attend several individual points of traditional observation, an overall estimate of attendance tends to be a 'best guess' scenario. As such, accurate numbers on funeral and other death ritual participation in Georgia is somewhat limited. However, funeral attendees can be grouped into three cohorts: primary mourners, wider mourners, and support mourners.

Primary mourners is a term that has frequently been used in death studies literature, although it seems to have no solid definition. Jean Palmer used the term in 1973 to describe those with the most buy in to religious ritual acts. In anthropological literature, Roy Richard Grinker (1990) describes the Efe hunter-gathers as the primary mourners at the Lese farmer's funerals in the Ituri rainforest region of Zaire, but he gives no explanation of either the context or meaning of this statement. More recently, Tony Walter (2011) gives a definition of *primary mourners* as 'close family' to the deceased, but, as Eva Reimers shows (2011), those most affected by the death being the close family is only guaranteed in a stable, heteronormative model and tends to exclude family-of-choice from consideration. It also seems to set itself in slight opposition to Walter's research (1996) citing a shift away from kinship norms being the principal measure of grief. Instead, I advocate a shift away from the classification of primary mourners as those that have the closest connection to the

deceased, and instead to a categorization of those that categorize themselves as or perform as greatly affected emotionally by the death as well as those that due to social expectation other mourners and individuals in the social sphere regard them as if they do or should fall into the first category. As such, the role of primary mourner is a position that can be bestowed due to social pressures or donned via social performance of grief.

Walter (2011) refers to the extended family and friends of the deceased as secondary mourners. However, this categorization is again problematic in regard to Walter's own work as it still stumbles in acknowledging shifting kinship norms in relation to contemporary mourning practices. Nonetheless, this classification is shared in Tara Baily's work where she distinguishes wider mourners as 'mourners who have no involvement with the decision-making process [of the funeral]' (2012: 11). Both of these seem to be functionalists categorizations of mourning activity centered around fiscal and legalistic understandings of responsibilities connected to funeral arranging. However, if mourning is, as Walter states, 'the behaviour that social groups expect following bereavement' (1999: xv), or as Brabant argues 'social expectations as well as cultural definition that tell us how important our loss is; whether we have the right to grieve; and, if so, how much, how long, and in what ways can and should we do' (2002: 30), categories of mourners cannot be focused on fiscal obligation. Instead, categories could reflect the performance of social expectations in response to a bereavement. If primary mourners are those that display the behavior as those most affected by grief, or those expected to be, then wider mourners can be seen as those mourners that either perform as those lesser affected

with grief, or those that have a social expectation in which their larger social group expects them to act as such.

In addition to the two previous categories which have generally been used, but undefined, in death studies literature, during my fieldwork a third section of mourners emerged that I have labeled support mourners. These are mourners that are not personally affected by grief nor do they have a social position that obligates them to perform as if they did or should. Indeed, these are mourners that attend death and funerary rituals in which they have no personal or social connections to the deceased; instead, these are individuals that do so in support of either primary or secondary mourners. Alternatively, they themselves may have no obligation or connections, but they may instead attend in lieu of a primary or secondary mourner that do have a connection and are unable to attend. It may even be the case that the primary or secondary mourners they are representing may be unable to attend due to their own death.

Material Culture of Funerals

As a study interested not only in the semiotics of funeral-food traditions, but also in the material aspects of the construction, provision, and consumption of the food items themselves, the discussion of funeral food can be seen as an example or subset of material culture studies. The interest in the material has long existed within social research, but material studies as a topic of observation is most often associated with anthropology and anthropological methodologies. In this field, Leslie White (1949) was an early pioneer in promoting the study of the material in the analysis of cultural trends and traditions. However, because, like much of the work in this era,

White's work contains an ethnocentristic drive, focused mainly on othering non-Western peoples, and as such early attempts to analyze material culture often marginalize the subjects of those studies (Woodward 2007), and most modern works tend to avoid such exclusionary practices.

One modern academic attempting to avoid the problematic practices noted above while engaging in research addressing topics such a death and dying, the dead body, and funeral practices and display is Sheila Harper. Harper is one of the most prolific experts on the material culture of death, and perhaps the foremost expert on the material culture of the funerary body. Drawing on comparative research conducted in the United States and England, Harper (2008) problematizes the concept of a 'Western' approach to death and funerals by analyzing both the material objects involved in deathways in both areas as well as analyzing the various interactions with the objects in question. Using the same approach, Harper (2010) also published commentary on the functionality of the corpse as a social agent, the importance of contemporary grave good and how grave goods foster interaction between the living and the dead (Harper 2012), and the material culture connected to the social identity of the deceased (Harper 2010).

However, due to Harper's work's situation within industrial spaces of death, food remains a mostly absent subject. However, tantalizing glimpses can be seen. In both fieldwork locations, Harper mentions the provision of coffee and tea by the funeral establishments to the bereaved in a way that the provisioners do not consider a provided service but instead a social comfort (2008: 74, 86). However, the hot beverages are simply mentioned in passing, and any exploration of the materiality is ignored completely. Likewise, in her American fieldwork context, Harper makes a

brief mention of funeral home visitors bringing and sharing food— possibly connected to food gifting traditions that form the bulk of this study (2008: 74). This mention is again quickly passed over, no definite examples or observations are made, and as so no insight into the material or interpersonal aspects of this death related eating can be gleaned. Nonetheless, Harper does have one passage where food in her professional funeral context is explored in slightly greater depth in the American context. In a passage describing the various paraphernalia (photos, toys, religious objects, personal touchstones, etc.), Harper recounts how one deceased man's daughter considered 'bringing in a basket of produce as her father was known for his love of tomatoes' (2008: 111), but had decided against it. The appropriateness of this food display was questioned in a way that the other object based mementos or traditional gifts of cut flowers or houseplants were not. Because of the lack of clarity on the appropriateness of this food display, the daughter erred on the side of caution and did not provide the tomatoes.

Still, the lack of a focus on food in studies of material culture surrounding death and loss is not unique to Harper's work. Drawing on research conducted around a single South London community, Daniel Miller and Fiona Parrott again focus on more permanent aspects of material culture and, for the most part, do not engage with food as a topic of interest. Instead, their only foodstuff based example is *food* beings listed as a way to re-establish individuality after suffering a loss (2009: 213).

In a more contemporary study, Renske Visser and Fiona Parrott (2014) explore the memorial practices and responses to loss amongst Dutch young people. In this second collaborative work of Parrott's, a focus on the permanent artifacts of

material culture remains. Visser and Parrott's only tangential reference to food or eating habits is the example of a young woman that realized her cutlery reminded her of her deceased mother as the young woman was preparing to move (2014: 4). Visser and Parrott have a strong paper in showing how after a loss young people can act as 'curators of their own presentational spaces,' and show how bodily adornment can act as an important linking factor between the living and the dead (2014: 17). Yet, while a strong study of what is put on the body is reported, Visser and Parrott do not examine what is put in the body — an exception to this may be the act of listing to music. This study shows the importance of listing to music associated with the dead by young people, and like food, this musical consumption may be seen as the bereaved taking the material culture of death within their own bodies.

This lack of focus on food in material culture studies stands in direct opposition to the philosophy of material culture Miller himself develops. Drawing heavily on Goffman's concept of frame analysis, Miller (2005) presents a theory of material culture in which the materiality of an object is in fact highlighted, not subsumed, by the lack of the viewers' awareness of the physicality of the object. Under this model, music is studied as a part of material studies due to the important but overlooked physical interactions necessary in the experience of listening to a song. Due to its ubiquitous nature via symbols in society and in the maintenance of life, food is an often-overlooked material object that is constantly being interacted with by those subject to any social research study. As such, Martin Gibbs, et al.'s (2014) work on loss, funerals, and Instagram can be re-examined as part of a material landscape. The digital photos presented within Instagram as a platform still require material interaction to access, but more importantly, answer Miller's challenge to

consider the ephemeral in relation to material culture (2005: 5). These digital photographs are still subject to, at least to Miller, what is the most important aspect of material culture — the normalization of objects in a viewer's life to the points where the object becomes both persistent and simultaneously overlooked. For Miller, this transitional point becomes the stage, à la Goffman, where an object can then acquire semiotic functions free from specific individuals' overt implementation of such. Due to these factors, Miller also suggests that the immaterial, especially in a more digital age, can and should be considered as a form of material culture.

However, it is not just an individual's interaction with an object that makes material culture of especial interest in social research. Objects can be imbued with meaning even if the circumstances of a bereavement disallow the opportunity for two living individuals to interact and form memories around an object. Linda Layne (2000) and Chiara Garattini (2007) both present distinct but complementary studies pertaining to this concept. Both reports present studies of bereaved parents who have lost babies through miscarriage or stillbirth, and attempt to connect to the infant through interaction with objects they had planned to use with the child had it lived. Layne and Garattini both present objects that individuals felt should have had strong memory associations that are, due to this belief, later presented with memories *in absentia*.

Families and the Researcher's Family

Family Research in Death Studies

Family has always been at the forefront of research into death studies in a variety of ways. Fairly typical engagements with death studies can be seen in

Christine Valentine's (2010, 2009) engagement with the impact of ancestral veneration on contemporary grief patterns in Japan and how those traditions being deployed alongside medicalized dying dictates a specific performance of grief from bereaved that have recently lost a member of the family. In Valentine's work, the family is used as a lens to examine conflicting trends in Japanese society — engaging with the debate of traditionalism versus modernity.

As another perspective on families' interactions with death, Myfanwy Maple et al.'s (2013) work with parents of young people that were determined to have committed suicide shows the tendency in personal life narratives to maintain the deceased as active members of the family unite, and to define family in such a way that the deceased can still be incorporated. While Maple's research shows the importance of permanent locations and objects in the memorial process that allows this continuation of family, I hope to examine how transitory spaces and objects, in the form of food and the funeral-food rituals, may impact this occurrence.

A third key way that death studies tends to engage with the concept of family is through specific familial narratives surrounding death. John Barner and Paul Rosenblatt (2008) use a traditional social research Maussian gift–debt perspective to examine the impact on the marriages of adult offspring after the loss of a parent. By doing so, Barner and Rosenblatt examine how couples construct vignettes from their personal life stories to create narratives of equality or indebtedness surrounding a bereavement event. In an attempt to widen the view of grief in a family context, Miri Nehari et al. (2007) examined the stories of grandparents that had lost grandchildren, and show the complexities of emotions and difficulties in constructing narratives of extended family members during bereavement. Andrew Goodhead's (2010) work

examines written memorials by bereaved family members, and shows that the remaining family members 'undergo a process of loosing ties to the dead and re-assimilating them into the present' (2010: 339) through the construction of narratives. While Goodhead's work is about a transitory memorialization, it is not repeated as ongoing traditions in the way that the funeral-food events I will observe are. This will allow me to look at the evolution and learning of these re-assimilating narratives and themes.

The fourth and final major trend I would like to remark on in the discussion of Death Study's interaction with family is the tendency to explore a family unit's role as a functional element in the death, dying, and mourning processes. This perspective seems to avoid what family is in this context, or even how family is done or achieved, in favor of examining what impact the family unit has on the death, dying, and disposal process. For example, Dianne Garnett et al.'s (2008) work focuses on the ability of family members to make important choices for incapacitated patients in ways which supported family narratives surrounding a 'good' or 'bad' death. Interestingly, true to Smart's critique that the focus on the term family tended to inadvertently support heteronormative hegemony mentioned above, Garnett's study attempts to deemphasize the heteronormative by adopting the term health-care confidants, but unfortunately, builds an overall paper that still implies the normative nature of the traditional family. Similarly, Lisa Sand et al.'s (2010) work examines the motivations of families to care for dying members. However, the work has some key flaws. Primarily, the work discusses family members without attempting to explain what version of family is being used. Also, Sand's work talks to individual family members at times it seems to be speaking for that family unit as a whole. This

specifically is a problem I hope to redress in my work by speaking to several members of the same family during my data collection process. Finally, while Sand's work does well to show the emotive narratives performed by the interviewed family members, it lacks an analysis of emotional debt in the vein of Barner and Rosenblatt that seems odd in its absence. As a final example, Sheila Harper (2012) shows how the family is the deciding agent in what makes the dead body of a loved one acceptable and authentic. In all of these examples, the family unit is shown to be an arbiter of choice in the death, dying, and memorial process.

However, some scholars have been able to blend several to all of these interactions between families and death studies to great success. Janice Winchester Nadeau's (1998) work explored how families negotiated the mourning and bereavement process after a loss of an individual considered a part of that family unit by the participants. While Nadeau's work does still privilege close biological and cohabitation relationships, she does explore how both the unit as a whole functions during the meaning making process while also examining how individual members of the family unit respond to those cohorts' determined decisions. While Nadeau does not seem to be influenced by Finch in her analysis, both scholars share similar themes of display and display's impact on creating a unique family narrative. Nadeau illustrates how the family acts together to produce a meaning-making narrative that functions as a group version of the truth pertaining to the familial death by acting together and reinforcing specific thoughts and phrases. This meaning-making narrative is repeated to different individuals in the family unit, and is reinforced through comparisons with the outside world; by examining how these narratives are

utilized, Nadeau shows that a give and take exists between broader cultural factors and the specific familial practices in the bereavement narrative that is constructed.

More recently, Tara Bailey (2012) argues that the performative elements displayed by those that actively do not consider themselves family, also help to define who is included in the family unit. As a way of expanding Finch's theory, Bailey uses data gathered from Britain's Mass Observation Project to show that, while at a funeral setting members of a family unit do in fact display family, those that surround them also add to the construction of family by setting themselves apart from the primary family unit.

Family Research in Food Studies

Just as in death studies, the family has maintained an importance in the growth and evolution of Food Studies. However, as Food Studies is a broad sub-discipline that draws on a variety of subjects, to maintain my anthropological and social research focus, I will not be addressing the family's role in food production, food pathways, or biological nutritional science, and instead only focus on food studies interactions where food is shown to be a part of a family's material culture.

One of the major places Food and Family Studies overlap is around the examination of what constitutes a culturally appropriate proper meal, and the normative perception of how those meals should be observed. In the Anglo-American context, this leads to a substantial body of literature on the daily family meal. The daily family meal has been linked in the literature to a variety of outcomes ranging from individuals receiving better nutrition to children learning greater social skills (Weinstein 2005). However, far from being academically neutral assessments,

these articles tend to have a prescriptive view of the normative experience and tend to engage in minimizing a dialog where a family unit, or individuals inside that family unit, can be proud of their fat bodies or other non-normative choices. This is a process known as fat shaming, and it problematizes the fat body as universally unhealthy under a cultural biomedical model (Farrell 2011). As such, there is a tendency to assume that the people making high fat, high-calorie choices are uninformed on the dangers of fat, especially in fast food, and that a fast food meal as a family meal is less desirable than a home cooked meal (see Boutelle et al. 2007). Family meals are thus seen as a way to both introduce and police normative food consumption patterns in the family unit (Videon and Manning 2003). Likewise, family meals are shown to be important and desired points of familial contact by a multigenerational cross section of the family unit (Fulkerson et al. 2006). However, all of the above examples state or seem to imply that the family meal as a concept is somehow under threat or on the decline. Instead, Anne Murcott (1997) suggests that this assumption of the decline of the family meal not only idealizes the extent that family meals occurred in the past, but is a repeated narrative that has occurred throughout the modern period. This hints at a tantalizing link back to Gross's work on the shifting trends of tradition. Nonetheless, while the daily family meal has had a good amount of inquest surrounding it, family food events such as the funeral meals that form the bulk of my study have received comparatively little attention.

However, the family meal is not the only point of intersection between Food and Family Studies. Families have been viewed as gatekeepers in the education of culturally appropriate food habits, and a primary point in learning how and what is considered proper to eat as a meal (Bourdeaudhuij and Van Oost 1998). This point is

a particular interest to this thesis, as there is a tendency in the fieldwork location to delineate proper food choice in funeral-food contexts. What is a culturally appropriate choice from a proper food choice, especially in the family setting, remains a popular course of study (Johansson et al. 2013, Elliott 2013, Thorsted and Anving 2010). In the same way, food and family have been linked together as a marker of other factors such as class (see Kaplen 2013) or ethnic and racial identity (see Hughes 1997, Whitehead 1992).

However, for this project, the most influential example of food and family interacting lies in anthropologist Janet Carsten's (1995) work with the Malays in Pulau Langkawi. In this project, Carsten shows that it is the act of eating from the same foods created in the same hearth that constructs the kinship bonds of family amongst her research participants. While it would be the height of cultural hegemony to simply apply this finding directly to the Anglo-American context as well, Carsten's observations do open up avenues of inquest pertaining to the physical act of sharing food and the conceptual act of sharing relationships.

Researcher's Own Family in Death Studies

Researching one's own family can be a way of displaying the researcher's specific positionality and context without endless exposition on the part of the researcher. However, very little research of this sort has been done in death studies. In fact, I can find very little research even related to this sort of research in death studies related topics. G. Thomas Couser (2004) reviewed subjected auto-ethnographic writings in comparison to the subject's obituary after her suicide in an effort to examine how harm can be committed against an individual after death.

However, while Couser was using his subject's reflections on family, and the comments added by her family, to construct a specific subjectivity, it was not his subjectivity that was being engaged with. Similarly, Anne Grinyer (2006) used narratives written by bereaved parents about their recently deceased child to show how the act of creating narratives can help allow the dead subject to live on as a part of the family. Again, while Grinyer engages with family members to construct a specific subjectivity of the deceased children, she does not use family to add insight into her own subjectivity.

Researcher's Own Family in Food Studies

However, the researching of one's own family in Food studies is far more common. Mary Douglas (1972) uses her own experiences as an individual that prepares meals and an individual that consumes meals, alongside ethnographic study of her own family, to examine what constitutes a proper meal in middle class England as well as questioning if meals are indicators of distance and intimacy by contrasting the experience of family meals with that of drinks in the home with colleagues. Douglas's use of her own family both allowed her to be honest about the inclusions of her own voice and perspectives (1972: 61) while also providing tightly focused scholarship on academic observations (1972: 78). The reader is able to see Douglas's embedded nature in the society that she is examining, and by doing so can examine if and how her closeness to the situation is providing blinders or added insight. By using examples from her family, Douglas is able to show how food itself is both a coded material and an item that codes different types of social interaction.

Carol Counihan's (2004) work also used her family as subjects for analysis. However, unlike Douglas's study, Counihan's work examines her then husband's biological relations instead of her own. As such, in her discussion of gender and shifting cultural contexts, Counihan is able to add observations an outside observer would never be privileged to. Additionally, Counihan is further able to note the dynamics and the specific cultural contexts that expect an individual to adapt to the normative view of an outside family unit and culture, thus, in essence, blending a familial and nonfamily study. Connectedly, including several participants in my study who are noted to be of my own family will allow the reader a window into the specific positionality that I am bringing to this project.

Conclusion

Food is a common but usually secondary topic in anthropological research, and the literature on funeral food is scant. Mead's challenge to address global hunger and food insecurity is both socially important but potentially academically disastrous, as it further jeopardizes such studies; thus, I aim to fuse her challenge within this academic study of funeral food rather than understanding her challenge as an either/or proposition. Borre's analysis of the traditional Inuit diet, culture and generational differences keeps food as a physical reality and socially active element central, which provides me with a model to do the same. Similarly, Counihan's approach to food-based research provides a model for discussing gender and identity, while maintaining food's centrality, and provides me with the life-history interview style, with a narrative guided by the informants but analyzed by the researcher. Holtzman's discussion of bad cooking raises the notion that breaks from the routine

have an important role in creating memory, which may help explain how funeral food functions. Rosenblatt and Wallace show food as simultaneously material culture and a way to connect with the departed.

The mediated representation of funeral food provided by professional institutions in the funeral business, instances of funeral consumption and branding call for further study: daily food consumption choices have a profound impact on people, but consumption choices at times of emotional crisis have received insufficient attention. Studies of consumption use whiteness as an unacknowledged ideal but neglect to overtly address such "normative whiteness," and this unreflected-upon and unobserved nature of whiteness urgently needs to be addressed. Funeral trends are shifting dramatically, and the provision of food by specialized funeral professionals is a new phenomenon; incidental costs are one of the few remaining unmediated parts of the funeral process. In a modernized funeral setting, loss of agency, customization, and interpassivity occur and overlap with each other. The post-funeral food experience remains under-researched, but combining the consumptions of food and materials surrounding a funeral creates a new and dynamic avenue of academic inquest.

The natural intersection of food studies and death studies is found in the ritual actions and material culture of, and surrounding the concept of, the funeral feast. For this discussion, by funeral feast I mean a ritualized event that usually 1) is a gathering, 2) is large in number relative to the local community, 3) is timed to coincide with the physical disposal of a deceased member of that community, 4) is marked by the sharing of food, and 5) consists of either traditional, symbolic items, a whole meal or meals, or both. 'Some ethnographers [draw the distinction between]

genuine funeral feasts [and] “commemorative” feasts for the dead’ (Hayden 2009: 32), considering the latter to be memorial meals separated from the physical disposal of the deceased and usually completed at prescriptive times of the year. For this project, I am not looking at commemorative feasting for the dead events, but I am expanding the focus to include not only funeral feasts, but also any other traditional, ritualized, or culturally normative social food interactions from the moment of bereavement until the funeral feast itself. It is my hope that this wider scope will allow me a more holistic understanding of food in the total funeral context.

Chapter 3
Kitchen Conversations: Research Method and Design

Overview

Using the ontological stance defined above, including a material-semiotic approach and particular concepts from social research theory — whiteness, the conceptualization of family, rites of passage, and communitas — I have conducted social-science influenced "insider" ethnographic fieldwork on the ritual funerary practices surrounding the preparation and consumption of funeral foods in the Southern United States. I employ unstructured, food-centered, life-narrative interviews in this work in order to catalog and highlight the perspectives of cultural participants in an effort to categorize *in situ* perceptions of cultural funeral-food practices in relation to wider social research on funeral-food traditions and practices, as well as participants' perceptions of those selfsame practices. I also include analysis of social media and cultural media depictions of funeral-food rituals as part of this research.

It is not my goal to explore Southern funeral-food culture in its entirety; rather, I want to utilize these funeral-food practices and shared experiences of to engage with the narratives of those rendered invisible in their dominance — normative members of the white middle class. As discussed in the previous chapters, social research on minority funeral traditions often compares them to an undiscussed and unreflected upon normative experience; this present research seeks to fill that lacuna by providing research on the normative experiences of funeral traditions in the fieldwork location. To do so, I will examine if and how food is important to

funeral rituals in the context of specific white representations of religion, gender, and family. I will also examine if food and funeral rituals are linked, what the importance of food shows about cultures of whiteness at the fieldwork location, and how this specific culture of whiteness approaches, perceives, and deals with death.

Project Design

Death itself is an unpredictable factor, and as such, this project was designed to maximize the potential to participate in postmortem and funeral-food traditions embedded within the community. As such, two fieldwork collection periods, from late May to early September, were conducted in two consecutive years. Due to the longer periods of daylight and local school schedules, this was the period in which informants indicated they were able to attend as many of the appropriate events as they could, or, as one informant, Becky was able to say, 'what we do and food we bring is the same all year round. But in the summer, there is enough daylight that I can make all the funerals that I feel like I'm supposed to and my pack (of children) are either with me or their dad, so I'm not having to worry about rushing off to pick them up and actually have time to take the casserole somewhere'.

Participants were initially found amongst members of the community in attendance at open mortality centered events, such as death cafes, public historical lectures, and events commemorating and reconstructing the funerals of local historic individuals. These initial informants introduced me to their wider social networks and then other participants were recruited via snowball sampling. From these participants, individuals with the longest connections to the community were selected as the interview participants. Informants would let me know when they planned to

attend a funeral or funeral-food event and invite me to accompany them. As an insider researcher, I also was attending postmortem and funeral-food events within my own extended social network. As such, during my research period, I would attend to, on average, one to three events a week; still, some weeks would pass without any of these events, while in one specific week, I attended eight events. During the total duration of my preliminary and actual fieldwork research periods, I was able to participate in nearly one hundred funeral and postmortem events. To honor the importance and solemnity of these events, notes were taken after the event.

Food-centered interviews serve as the main avenue of inquest in this thesis. Counihan's latest individual work, *A Tortilla is Like Life: Food and Culture in the San Luis Valley of Colorado* (2009), documents the lives of about twenty *Mexicanas* in the small town of Antonito. Antonito is a small, traditionally Hispanic community in southern Colorado that, in the years preceding Counihan's fieldwork, experienced massive emigration from the area to larger cities. In this work, Counihan continues her greater themes of women's studies and identity creation with *A Tortilla is Like Life* and attempts to illustrate the struggle for traditional communities to maintain cohesion in a rapidly globalizing world. She pays specific attention to the way older generations feel a connection to place through food, a feeling that the members of younger generation she interviews lack. Counihan illustrates this point by showing the formerly self-sufficient nature of food from this area in contrast to the increasing dependence on the small local supermarket. Still, Counihan shows how the struggle to maintain *Mexicana* influence in the food consumed in the home while participating in an otherwise Americanized culture provides the women she

interviews with a vehicle for self-determination and self-definition. Counihan maps the way that food is a primary mechanism for identity construction.

Counihan illustrates what a food-centered narrative interview is and can add to academic inquest. The participants are asked about food experiences, but the interlocutors themselves then guide the process, linking various food memories together to construct an overall food narrative for the interviewer. These food narratives keep foodstuffs central to their focus through the use of sense-based language — that is, discussion of smells, tastes, textures, etc. instead of the discussion of the dishes in a more abstract way — and through actual recipes embedded in the analysis. Counihan then tracks individuals' physical and emotional interactions with the foodstuffs discussed, to allow for the mapping of greater social trends such as gendered and class interactions.

Interviews

I conducted twenty interviews, undertaken as personal food-based narratives in the manner described below. On average, each session took three hours. Most informants were interviewed multiple times. Because not all informants felt comfortable with audio recording, notes were taken during breaks in the interviews and afterwards. Those that were recorded were transcribed and grouped to preserve narrative integrity. The primary analytical tools were narrative and thematic analysis. Because of problems with anonymization addressed below, each research participant was asked whether they wanted to opt into the anonymization process at the time of the interview.

Social and Cultural Media

For reasons described at greater length below, I include analysis of social media and cultural media depictions of funeral-food rituals. To conduct this research, I drew on methods from the *Popular Culture in the Contemporary World* Series (see Beumers 2005; Fraser and Hoffmann 2006), using industry-specific online databases in conjunction with open source databases to find specific media related to both the topic of death and the American South, and then excluded properties that did not mention or depict either postmortem or funeral-food activities.

To select blogs for analysis, I searched "Southern Funeral Food" and "Funeral Food in the American South" in multiple permutations on all major search engines. Then, I narrowed the results to blogs posted by non-food-industry sources and those that were not false positives. I also examined blogs not appearing in the primary search return but linked to in the initial blogs I found.

Overview of the Fieldwork Area

In chapter 4, to give context for this research, I present statistical data from the US Census data and the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) for three of the fifteen Northwest Georgia counties, but use information from the 20% of counties explicitly listed to analyze general trends of the area. In keeping with the rest of this thesis, this religious outline focuses on the most commonplace and normative population in the region — in this case, Protestant Christians — to establish an analytical baseline for both the area and, more broadly, the study of funerary and postmortem food expressions and events.

Like all data sets, these sets have some inherent limitations. Primarily, these databases are not built to handle the large amount of intercounty travel inherent in the region. However, this lack of sensitivity to geographical movement is supplemented by my qualitative fieldwork data and experiences. Other weaknesses will be discussed in specific when they arise in the course of analyzing the data presented by the databases.

Methodological Issues

All aspects of this study — the people, the topic, and the location — raise specific methodological issues. In doing qualitative research, researchers most often deal with participants' words and (typically verbal) narratives (Reinharz 1994). Because of this, we tend to privilege what the research participant says as opposed what they leave out or leave unsaid (Nairn 1997). In particular, the tendency to create a non-reflective White "default" position and present it as universal often operates as an unspoken, or even unrealized, set of assumptions (Kelly 2014).

People, including researchers, have different opinions based on the construction of their variable social networks, and death studies has examined the situatedness of the research practitioner and the complexities of the researcher as an emotive, embodied individual (Jafari et al. 2013, Brak-Lamy 2012, Cain 2012, Todd 2013). In 'My Life after Death,' Kate Woodthorpe (2007) examines and reflects on the emotional complexities of separating herself and her emotive reactions from her research goals, and how studying end-of-life issues makes this more complex. In 2009, Woodthorpe revisited this topic in 'Reflecting on Death,' which prepares the novice researcher for the emotive impact of the research and data-analysis process,

and expanded on the systematic issues inherent in qualitative research literature. With great sensitivity and nuance, Christine Valentine also examines how the researcher must balance preconceptions, emotional reactions, and reflections with strict methodological interpretation, especially when engaging with sensitive research topics such as those encountered in death studies ('Methodological Reflections' 2007).

These concerns were kept in mind during the research collection stage and were addressed via frequent check-ins with my supervisory team during the data collection and analysis stage of my research.

Ethnography

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, in a 1952 editorial letter to *American Anthropologist*, wrote about a meeting some forty years prior:

> A meeting of teachers from Oxford, Cambridge and London was held to discuss the terminology of our subject. We agreed to use the term 'ethnography' as the term for descriptive accounts of non-literate peoples…. The comparative study of the institutions of primitive societies was accepted as the task of social anthropology, and this name was preferred to 'sociology' (275).

The problematic nature of the academic gaze on the bodies of persons of color is overwhelmingly evident here; a separation between the academic goals of recording the embedded practices of *in situ* cultural interaction and the analysis thereof is evident as well. Likewise, the sand was already shifting under the definition Radcliffe-Brown gave when the letter was published. For example, Mary Douglas's *Peoples of the Lake Nyasa Region* was a solid blend of what Radcliffe-Brown would class as both ethnographic observations and social-anthropologic analysis. By Douglas's publication of 'Deciphering a Meal' in 1972, her work — using her own

family as research subjects, blending observational and analytical skills, and overall rendering Radcliffe-Brown's definition moot — was at the forefront of anthropological thinking. Radcliffe-Brown notes that this shift came about when it became more common for anthropologists to believe that their work should be 'based on systematic field studies carried out by trained anthropologists using scientific methods of observation' (1952: 276–277), though as can be seen in Douglas's work above, what constitutes the field can easily be shifted to fit the needs of the specific study.

However, despite the replacement of Radcliffe-Brown's definition of ethnography with a more modern definition, vestiges of that earlier thinking remain. Attempting to find a more modern definition of ethnography, Alan Barnard writes, '[i]n social and cultural anthropology, a distinction is often made between "ethnography" and "theory". Ethnography is literally the practice of writing about people. Often it is taken to mean our way of making sense of other peoples' modes of thought, since anthropologists usually study cultures other than their own' (2000: 4). In Barnard's definition, ethnography is a practice, a practical application of thought or skill. He goes on to write that 'theory and ethnography inevitably merge into one.' However, his definition minimizes the seminal importance placed on recording peoples' specific habits as embedded in particular places and times, and it privileges the immediate theoretical analysis of that data.

Other researchers have categorized ethnography as a practice that 'involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions—in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues

that are the focus of the research' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 1). In this definition, ethnography is reduced to a means by which social anthropology is conducted and not an ends unto itself. Absent from this definition is the recording of peoples' *in situ* lived experiences as an objective unto itself to add to the academic conversation. Harry Wolcott writes that as with other subjects, '[w]e are accustomed to hearing about research framed in terms of goals, objectives, theories, issues to be investigated, or problems to be addressed. Ethnographic research is often spoken of this way, but it is not necessarily *practiced* this way' (2008: 19).[8] Wolcott goes on to describe ethnographic research as an inductive process by which the researcher interacts with and observes people's lived experiences, categorizes those experiences, and records them.

In the current academic climate, it has been noted that projects with only ethnographic outputs — without traditional theoretical, social-anthropologic engagement — have the potential to be undervalued and marginalized in wider academic conversations, especially when the output is not a more traditional monograph (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2015). As someone conducting a project with a strong material-culture component and interested in recording contemporary practices for posterity, I was particularly cognizant of these issues during my research design process. Likewise, as someone planning on conducting my research in the area where I was raised, I worried about the implications of this insider perspective when, as Barnard notes, there is still an expectation in place that anthropologists will study cultures other than their own.

[8] Emphasis in the original.

To mitigate these issues, I turned to Nicole Angotti and Christie Sennott's definition of insider ethnography. Angotti and Sennott, in an effort to be sensitive to the problematic distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider' vis-à-vis specific positional understanding (see Turgo 2012). Note that 'insider status is variable, context-dependent, and shaped by one's own status within the community. For our purposes here we conceptualize 'insiders' as those who are indigenous to the communities of interest and 'outsiders' as those who are foreign to them' (2015: 438). They also acknowledge that

> insiders have unique, intimate, and regular access to everyday conversations that those who are foreign to the research setting do not, and could not, unless they were prepared to spend years learning the language of the community and living within it, as classical ethnographers do…. [Insiders] have privileged access to the social processes and interactions taking place within it…. [I]nsider ethnographers can thus facilitate access to research populations, increase efficiency in the data collection process, and enhance insights (Schatz et al., 2014). For these reasons, we believe that 'insider ethnography' serves as an important addition to the current arsenal of methodological strategies and can provide added value for studies where having an insider status may be of particular benefit. (Agnotti and Sennott 2015: 438–439)

My familiarity with the research location, as well as features of specific positionality, such as my accent, knowledge of local history, and colloquialisms, was able to be used in agreement with the above to navigate my research environs.

Digital Ethnography

Connected to but theoretically distinct from the above discussion is digital ethnography. Digital ethnography is often spoken of as a means of distribution — that is to say, using new and digital media to recreate a sense of the ethnographic experience for viewers of the ethnographic data, or to '[represent] real-life cultures through combining the characteristic features of digital media with the elements of

story' (Underberg and Zorn 2013: 10). In this study, however, I use the term to mean the digital landscape as the point of ethnographic inquiry. With digital ethnography, many of the same foundational ethnographic principles as found in traditional ethnography are in place, except the researcher 'is often in mediated contact with participants rather than in direct presence' (Pink et al. 2016: 3). Chretien et al. (2015), in their examination of the professional development of medical students via Twitter, use digital ethnography in this manner. Using this already public-facing information while acknowledging the format's constructed nature, the research team identified the digital landscape as a means, driven by the posters' own agency, to gain insight into their research area. Monica Barrett and Alexia Maddox identify this form of digital ethnography as especially suited for researching and engaging with vulnerable and marginalized peoples, as the poster has the ability to control the rate and content of their engagement. After a bereavement, research participants may be hard to access in person, but it is possible to find their narratives embedded in the digital landscapes in which they participate. I used the same sampling method as with other mediated material, and the inclusion of these accounts granted greater breadth to this project.

The interpersonal data provided by my ethnographic material alongside the interviews are not the totality of my empirical work. I present a social-research based evaluation of contemporary social-media accounts of funeral food below as a narrative, embedded vernacular meta-understanding of American Southern postmortem and funeral-food traditions. While, like film and literary representations of Southern funeral-food traditions, social-media accounts are more edited and restricted than fieldwork, the contemporaneity of blogs and other social media

material, along with their personal voice and the richness of their accounts, makes them a useful introduction to the food and funeral-food practices of the fieldwork area. However, this social-research based evaluation should also be seen as part and parcel of the anthropological study of popular-culture media, such as movies, novels, and songs, which precedes it.

Pop-Cultural Ethnography

What constitutes the appropriate arena for academic, social research is constantly being re-evaluated and revised, as

> Culture is an enigma now, a problematic concept for many scholars. It was once widely accepted that cultural systems were separate and bounded; today, we know that has never been the case. We know that cultural ideas, behaviours, and practices overlap, and that quintessentially authentic or pure traditions have never existed, not even in the days of "lost tribes" and other imagined isolations…systems are informed and shaped by complex and intersecting histories that surface in the present as complicated and intertwined global processes (Campbell and Lassiter 2015: 8).

With this acknowledgment, cultural artifacts that may have once been excluded from ethnographic inquest because they do not fit neatly into distinct cultural models, such as internationally released songs, movies, and novels, become viable avenues of study. If everything is acknowledged to be in this greater cultural dynamic, as long as specific cultural positionality is analyzed, objects that cross cultural 'boundaries' can and should be examined. In performing such analysis, subjects like country music's influence on lesbian culture (Ortega 1994), the popular novel's influence on teen subcultures (Petersen 2012), Hollywood's impact on African-American identity and culture (Fain 2015), and how anthropology influences and was influenced by the

early science fiction genre (Barnard 2006) all become important avenues of inquest in the allied social research fields.

Popular culture becomes an especially important lens when considering the impact of whiteness, due to the tendency to create a non-reflective white default position and present it as universal, which contributes to the othering of people of color and normalizes the neo-colonial action of the White body, especially in regards to culturally acceptable foodstuff and times for the white body to consume it (Kelly 2014). Individuals interact with these overarching structures in a way that creates a personal identity and collective norms (Hosein 2009). Notably, artistic and aesthetic expression can both reflect how a culture is structured and help promote and preserve specific modes of thought about that culture, from both within and outside that culture (David and Dankworth 2014). In the social research context, '[b]y emphasising the mediated quality of truth, [social researchers] not only question positivist celebration of value-free science but also turn the critical lens of inquiry on themselves as figures who authoritatively comment on others' (Majumder 2010: 290), and can be seen as an extension of the more traditional visual anthropological model (Pink 2009: 96).

Anonymization

Anonymization is a major ethical issue that I hope to problematize and address in my study. Anonymization in social research 'Simply means that we do not name the person or research site involved but, in research, it is usually extended to mean that we do not include information about any individual or research site that will enable that individual or research site to be identified by others' (Walford 2005:

85). In social research fields, standard ethical practice dictates that research details, such as participants, locations, and organizations should be anonymized to protect the identities, privacy, and interests of the research participants (Berkhout 2013). However, even though the reasons stated for compulsory anonymization often include protecting research participants from undue stress and harm after the findings have been published (Punch 1986), the ubiquity of the process has been challenged (Nespor 2000). An uncritical, unreflective use of anonymization in social research can lead to a final product that, in a paternalistic attempt to shield research participants while simultaneously empowering them, strips research participants' agency by placing their words in the mouths of fictional personas removed from contextualized times and places (Berkhout 2013).

This is not always in the best interest of the research participants or the research itself. Among other undesirable outcomes, anonymity may conflict with the stated research question and goals of the study (Marzano 2007). While there will always be studies in which anonymization of participants and locations is appropriate (Williams, Nathanson, and Paulhus 2010; Hawkins, Willoughby, Doherty 2012), the anonymization of participants and locations may decontextualize the research to such an extent that the conclusion is uninformative to readers (Tilley and Woodthorpe 2011). While efforts have been made to make the research process easier on research participants (Young, Hooker, Freeberg 1990), the anonymization process has been known to lead to a feeling of voicelessness and a sense of disempowerment in research participants (Grinyer 2002). Likewise, participants may wish to participate in the research. In my research, which deals with death and traditions, participants

have wanted to take part as a form of memorial. Forcing research participants to be anonymized removes their agency in the decision-making process.

In addition, as mentioned above, I consider myself just as much of a research participant as my interviewees are. Because I will not be anonymized, forced anonymization of interviewees had the potential to cause a power imbalance that may be hard to account for; therefore, I allowed each research participant to opt into the anonymization process at the time of the interview. All research participants deferred to me in the decision, and with no strong opinion on the matter from my interviewees I opted to anonymize all named participants. Likewise, due to the covert nature of ethnographic study, no specific town locations have been given, to anonymize the data further. The only exceptions to this are with regard to the matronymic of recipes presented in index 2 and popular-culture content, for which I identified individuals as they presented themselves in print or on public forums. With regard to the matronymic of recipes, I was asked to keep the original names of the dishes, as they are memorial objects, and I have honored this request.

Unstructured, Food-Centered, Life-Narrative Interviews

Because this study was designed to examine funeral-food gift sharing events and was not a latitudinal examination of the area in general, or all death, food, or gifting, traditions, there existed the possibility that I would not be able to gain access to enough food events, or that there would not be enough events in the area in general, to fully conduct this research. While this was not the case, acknowledging the possibility of lack of access and planning a supplemental data collection pathway did allow me to gain data about funeral-food events in locations that were

underrepresented in my ethnographic process, such as church halls. Taking this into account, I planned to conduct semi-structured food-centered life-narrative interviews to supplement my ethnographic data.

During data collection in both fieldwork locations, I wanted food to remain central to the conversations that my informants and I had, so I planned to engage with what food scholar Carol Counihan refers to as 'food centered life narratives' (2004: ix) — a data collection style that revolves around the changing position of food in the research participants' lives. For my research, I was able to encourage the research participants to explore both recent and past funeral-food experiences and to note if they perceived any changes in their experience of the events throughout their lifetimes. Counihan (2004, 2009) accomplishes this in her research through a series of structured and semi-structured interviews with her research participants.

However, because funeral-food experiences are inherently likely to be a sensitive topic for many of the research participants, instead of repeating Counihan's practice of structured and semi-structured interviews, I conducted an unstructured, narrative, life-history interview with each informant, with the option to follow up with them if they consented. Other than my informing research participants of the research topic, the participants led and directed the flow and evolution of the conversation. As a working definition

> Unstructured interactive interviews are shared experiences in which researchers and interviewees come together to create a context of conversational intimacy in which participants feel comfortable telling their story (Ramos: 1989). The nature of unstructured interviews makes them contrary to what quantitative research is normally considered to be—a process in which distance and control are highly valued. At the start of an unstructured interview, participants [both interviewer and interviewee] are not always aware of the course that an interview might take or what secrets they might divulge. (Corbin and Morse 2009: 338)

Funeral-food experiences provided the context, and the participants directed the conversation.

Primarily, when dealing with sensitive issues like end-of-life care and grief, unstructured narrative interviews have been shown to empower the interviewee and help them maintain a homeostatic emotional level so that, when the interview is carried out correctly, it does not cause any more harm than everyday life (Corbin and Morse 2009). Although as Lee and Renzetti note, 'it is possible for any topic, depending upon the context, to be a sensitive one' (1990: 512), an increased sensitivity is needed when the interview topic is expected to be an especially emotive one. Likewise, when researchers 'make the assumption that all interviews are potentially harmful [it] takes away participant agency and control over what is said, how it is said, or if anything is said at all about a topic' (Corbin and Morse 2009: 337). This sensitivity can be reached by allowing research participants to maintain control of the interview process and thus only delve as far as they are comfortable with during the qualitative research process (Cassell 1980). Due to the subject of this study, the remembrance of funeral-food experiences, possibly being a sensitive topic for many of the research participants, conducting unstructured, narrative, food-based, life-narrative interviews allowed the stakeholders in the research process agency in determining both their comfort level and the depth of which they were willing to share. This method of data collection offered an ethical avenue to data collection for this project.

Blending together the traditions of both narrative and life history interviews allow me several avenues of unique insights for this project. Counihan's method utilizes traditional life-history interviewing and places food at the center; she then

also notes how the interviewee narratively links these food-based concepts in separate parts of their overall life story (e.g., Counihan 2004, 2009). Thus, she takes traditional life-history interviews which 'reaffirm the personal in social theorising, whilst providing a methodology in which individual and social worlds may be drawn together. In addition, eliciting life histories may promote a vivid sense of the research process, thus demystifying the often over technical and jargonised nature of social scientific study' (Goodley 1996: 333). While a traditional life history interview tends to be interested in the totality of an individual's life experience (Walmsley 1995), food-centric interviews shift to only when specific foods or food events appear in a person's life. Counihan's method then applies the structure of narrative interviews which 'invites … people to tell their story [and] facilitates the grounding of the social in concrete experience' (Valentine 2007: 43). This engages in a process of data validation by which academic integrity is established 'based on the ability of the researcher, methods and participants to generate material that fulfils the research aim(s)' (Skinner 2013: 86 in reference to Stenbacka 2001).

As a study with a tight emphasis on food, the position and conception of material culture is central to this research. Because of material culture's invaluable power as a tool for memory and their imbrication with daily life — what Simon Bonner speaks of as Americans' 'bonds to the things around them, [whose] very worldliness connects them directly to the society we live in' (1986: xi), all interviews were conducted in places, suggested by the participants, that were associated with funeral food—church kitchens, private kitchens, dining rooms, community halls—and while handling objects, again suggested by the participants, that were associated

with funeral food, such as cookware, food containers, foodstuff, flowers, and photographs.

The Fieldwork

Project Genesis

When I began my academic study in the United Kingdom, I was surprised to find how few funerals my colleagues had attended and how unsure they were of their expectations of what comprised a funeral or their ability to host such an event, should the need arise. When I began to delve into the anthropological and sociological literature about my home region connected to funeral-food events, I found the academic gaze resting almost exclusively on the minority body and little to no pertinent information forming a baseline understanding in the academic literature of non-minority activities. This, alongside Tony Walter's work (2005) on mortuary variety in the modern "West" formed the impetus for this research.

The Fieldwork Location

My specific fieldwork location was within Northwest Georgia. The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission acknowledges fifteen counties that include 49 municipalities as members: Bartow, Catoosa, Chattooga, Dade, Fannin, Floyd, Gilmer, Gordon, Haralson, Murray, Paulding, Pickens, Polk, Walker, and Whitfield counties. This is a rural and semi-suburban region where many residents live, work, and frequently visit across county borders. This ease of movement makes the area more easily broadly generalizable.

Defining the Funeral in the American South

Drawing from the totality of my research, here I will be discussing what is considered culturally accepted norms and traditions pertaining to funerary tradition in the American South. This is not to say alternative and exceptions do not exist in the area (see Boulware 2004 data on medical body donation or Dawson et al.'s 1990 comments on immediate disposition for examples of cultural disposal alternatives), but instead reflects the general expectations one may expect from an "average" or "typical" expression of these local traditions. Specific funerals in the community may omit or even add to any one aspect or tradition to meet the needs of their individual circumstance. Regional variance in the normative funeral experience in the American South extends to the very term itself.

While the term *funeral* is generally accepted to refer to a postmortem ceremony or rite that usually takes place around bodily disposition, during my fieldwork in Northwest Georgia, respondents used the term funeral, to refer to the service, the public visitation of the body, and the funerary meal after the service. Most interviewees cited attending any of these events in any combination as attending the funeral. Visiting a grieving individual in their homes with food gifts before the formal public visitation was not ever referred to as a funeral tradition though it was continuously cited as an expected practice. As such, this practice may more accurately be considered a postmortem tradition, or more specifically a tradition surrounding biological death, as opposed to a funeral tradition.

Keeping this distinction in mind, the events leading up to and including the funeral in the social context of my interviewees would be expected to flow thusly (subject to individual variation):

- The death of a socially connected individual occurs.
- The corpse is removed from the place of death by the staff of a funeral home that has been chosen by the family.
- Social networks are informed. This happens in one of two ways. The first is the active activation of social networks (phone calls, personal visits, social networking media, etc). The second is a more passive activation via the obituary section of the local newspaper. Upon receiving the notice, the funeral home will immediately contact the newspaper and place a death notice. The death notice includes the decedent's name, age, date of death, and what funeral home 'has charge of the arrangements'. Depending on the time of death, the death notice may appear the same day as the obituary or a proceeding day. The obituary is constructed by the funeral home staff, in the presence of the family when the other funeral arrangements are being decided. The obituary gives a biographical sketch of the deceased and also gives details of the 'funeral' including visitation and services.
- Once alerted to the death, members of the deceased, or their survivors', social networks contact and visit the bereaved. This is a social gathering that includes the bringing of food gifts to the bereaved, sharing stories of the deceased, re-establishing of waning social connections, and discovering of death and funeral details that often happens most often at the home of the deceased or a principal mourner (often the eldest daughter or sister of the deceased).
- The *visitation,* also referred to as *the viewing, friends and family, receiving of friends and family,* or *receiving* is the first of several traditions referred to by

my participants as being, or being a part of, the funeral. The visitation takes place at the funeral home, usually for three or more hours, in the presence of the casket. The body by this point is dressed (including hairstyling and make-up), embalmed, and placed in the casket. The casket lid is closed over the legs but remains open over the torso and face unless death was especially disfiguring. The guest file into the chapel or parlor hosting the event, move single file past the casket, and greet the family. After this is done, the guests can leave or socialize. The public visitation tends to last a few hours with the principal mourners granted extra time alone with the deceased before and after the event. During the interviews, participants spoke of attending an individual's funeral when they had only been present at this stage in the funerary ritual.

- The *funeral service*, also referred to as *the service* or *the funeral*, can traditionally take place in one of two locations. The service can take place in a church that the deceased individual or a principal mourner was or is affiliated with, and if that is the case the funeral home will arrange transportation of the casket. If the service is held at a church, the visitation is sometimes also held at the same location. If for whatever reason, a church service is not available or not preferred, the service can also be held at the funeral home. This often takes place in a chapel on the funeral home's premises. The service can be held in a time span ranging from immediately following the visitation to the next day. Several participants mentioned a social preference for an evening visitation followed by a funeral on the next day though this was not expressed by all or even most interviewees. There is

a normative expectation for the service to be conducted in a Protestant Christian tradition including hymns, scripture readings, and prayer and is often focused on memorialization. However, most participants did note that while it is not uncommon to simply participate in one other ritual of the funeral, it would be possible to just attend the service, but it is unlikely.

- The funeral procession transports the casket to the cemetery. Those at the funeral service drive their own cars sedately behind the hearse transporting the casket, and limousines provided by the funeral home for the principal mourners. The procession is attended by police cars to manage traffic and to keep the procession together through traffic lights and other driving hazards. Custom dictates that participants in the procession drive with their headlights illuminated and that observers pull their own cars to the shoulder of the road until the procession has passed.
- *The graveside service*, often simply referred to as *the graveside* or *graveside*, happens beside the open grave, but the open grave or disturbed dirt is never seen. At a graveside, the casket is sealed closed and is placed on a special stand that conceals the open grave. All disturbed dirt and nearby graves are covered with artificial turf. This is especially true in memorial garden type cemeteries where grave markers are uniformly bronze plates set flat against the ground. In more traditional cemeteries the artificial turf only covered the disturbed earth. While participants attend the funeral home staff place the casket and accompanying floral arrangements under a large tent that they have provided. Folding chairs are also provided for principal mourners. The service is once again religious in theme, often shorter, and less focused on

memorialization and instead to be more focused on theological concerns such as resurrection and the afterlife. The ceremony concludes at the end of the sermon/eulogy, and the participants leave the cemetery with the casket still above ground.

- After the graveside, participants adjourn to either the home of the deceased or a principal mourner for food. This often happens at the home where food has already been delivered in earlier parts of the death ritual. If for any reason the home was unavailable or inhospitable, a church hall was offered as an alternative location. While this gathering seems to have no specific name, it was referred to interchangeably and inconsistently as *the wake*, *the food*, and *going back to X's house* by participants, this practice was seen as an important and expected part of the funeral ritual. More food is provided by guests, even by those that had brought food previously. Participants socialize, and individuals who were unable to attend earlier parts of funerary traditions may attend this aspect. When prompted to define the parts of the funeral, most participants would not include this gathering and indicated that they would not consider just visiting this as attending the funeral. However, in their narratives, this tradition was referred to as a continuation of the funeral for those that had attended the service and/or the graveside.
- Unless influenced by an outside legal concern, interview participants agree that the interment should happen within three to five days of death.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the key methodological approach used to gather the data of this study was unstructured, food centered life narratives. In using census data from Northwest Georgia, the selected participants were White, Protestant, and working to middle class, as this overall study is interested in the funeral-food traditions of the normative population. The participants, who are listed in Appendix 2, were chosen via snowball sampling from initial contacts developed during public death events that commemorated local, historic figures. Next, to give greater context for the region, as well as supplement the lack of academic literature pertaining to the funeral-food traditions of the American South and its normative populations, I have supplemented the data gained through interviews with traditional, pop-culture, and digital ethnography to highlight both the wide cultural understanding of funeral-food traditions in the region and differences within those traditions. Finally, I present a working definition of funeral, which begins from the time the death is announced to the interment. This definition was gained through participant observation by travelling with my informants and due to the public nature of some aspects of funeral culture in the region of Northwest Georgia. In the following chapter, I provide further information on the area of Northwest Georgia and the ways in which mediated representations of Southern funeral-food traditions can inform these selfsame practices.

Chapter 4
Contexts: The American South and Northwest Georgia

The American South and Northwest Georgia

There is some debate as to what constitutes the American South. According to the United States Census Bureau, sixteen states — Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia — as well as the District of Columbia comprise the American South, making up one third of the overall United States (US Census Regions). However, it has long been argued that the boundaries of the socio-cultural entity that is the South do not neatly align with state borders (see Garreau 1981). Since the 1960s civil rights movement, Maryland and Delaware have more strongly aligned with the culture of the industrialized north, while parts of Texas and Oklahoma are more Western, Plains, or Midwestern (see Funk 2012; Grove et al. 2012; Blodgett 2015; Wohlers et al. 2014; Sheehan and Vadjunec 2012). Perhaps more useful is mapping the area where Southern American Vernacular English (or Southern American English) is spoken and correlates with Southern culture. Southern American English maps roughly to the US Census region, but allows for cultural slippage at the marginal borders (Nagle and Sanders 2003).

Based on both the Census model and the socio-linguistic metric, Georgia is a solidly Southern state with no cultural borders; that is to say, all states that border Georgia — Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina — are considered Southern States as well. Northern Georgia is considered part of many Southern micro-regions as well, allowing for this specific area to show a greater

cross-section of Southern culture: the Old South, Dixie, the Deep South, and Southern Appalachia.

Keeping this multivalent categorization of the American South in mind, this chapter will first document how religion, race, and socio-economic class are constructed and constituted in the area. Following this overview, in an attempt to provide greater context, instances of popular media, including film, literature, and music, will be examined, as they influence and change dominant cultural notions. As will be argued, popular media helps to train Southern post-funeral and postmortem traditions, which helps to show a continuation and social context of these traditions that exist in the collective social conscious, lives, and entertainment pertaining to those from this region, but does not currently exist within the academic dialog.

Religious Context

As mentioned in the methods discussion (chapter 3), participants in this study exist within an extended social network. Thus, while an individual may live the majority of their daily life within one county, it is just as likely that an individual may live in one county, work in another, regularly visit family in a third, and attend church in a fourth. Therefore, while none of my informants are identified by their specific cities or counties of residence, a regional overview remains accurate to their lived experiences. To maintain anonymity, I present statistical data for only three of the fifteen Northwest Georgia counties, but use information from all counties explicitly listed in Northwest Georgia to analyze general trends. In this study, focusing on the most commonplace and normative population in the region means, as the numbers below, focusing on the representation of Protestant Christianity in the

region. Statistics are from the US Census and the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA).

Floyd County, Georgia. Floyd County, Georgia is on the Alabama border, bordering one Alabama county in addition to five Georgia counties, all of which are included in the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission. Floyd County contains two cities: Rome, the most populous city in the region, with 36,303 residents as of the 2010 US Census, and Cave Spring, a much smaller city with a population of 1,200. The county also includes several unincorporated communities, such as Coosa, Armuchee, Shannon, and Model. These unincorporated communities may not have strong physical or statistical boundaries, but they are seen as having unique social distinctions in the area.

The United States Census Bureau estimates Georgia's Floyd County had a population of 96,504 among 34,794 households as of July of 2015, approximately 450 more people than the previous year. In this gross population, the median household income was reported at $41,046, with a slightly lower figure of $20,863 as the per capita income and 21.1% of people living in poverty. Of those 96,504 people, at the last count in the same report, 80.9% of the overall population of this area report[9] as the racial category 'White Alone.' Of the almost 19% of the population remaining, 14.8% of the population report as 'Black or African American Alone,' making this group the next largest as well as the most visible minority in the county.

[9] The US Census is a self-reported document and shares all of the pitfalls of this methodology. However, the verifiability of this information is not as important for this study. Instead, the census allows us to ascertain that a given population claims a particular category as their identity and presents as such in daily life. Thus, the debate of 'actual whiteness' is moot inasmuch as an overwhelmingly hegemonic presentation of whiteness is reported.

While the US census bureau does not report income or wealth data by race, it is of interest to note the corollary between the percentage of minority ethnic people and the percentage of people living below the poverty line. During my fieldwork, areas of the county that respondents considered poor, both socially and financially, were usually locations with proportionally higher Black and/or Latin American populations throughout all counties I visited.

In contrast to work performed by the US Census Bureau, ARDA is on a ten-year reporting cycle, meaning that their most recent data is from 2010. However, general opinions can still be drawn from this resource; likewise, informants during my fieldwork reported a general consistency in religious life, supporting the use of this information. From ARDA's 2010 data, the population of Floyd County includes 60,906 religious adherents (63.24% of the total population) in 170 religious congregations. However, there are some limitations in the ARDA sampling and reporting methods. Once again, this database is not built to report cross-county movement. ARDA also only collects data based on religious groups. Thus, unaffiliated churches and congregations are completely excluded from ARDA's database. Of the 170 congregations that do report, several do not include local attendance numbers despite having local, established congregations. Likewise, individuals who have a personal identification with a particular faith or denomination but have no formal attendance records have no way to be tracked in this system. Thus, religious adherents in Floyd County make up a larger number of the population than the 63.24% mentioned above indicates. Likewise, of those religious adherents reported, 18 individuals are listed as members of Bahá'í faith, and 105 congregants are listed under Reform Judaism. Excluding these 113 individuals, and considering

the Christian adherents excluded from ARDA's information for the above reason, the 60,906 (63.24%) number can be used as a working minimum approximation of active Christian adherents in Floyd County. That is to say, this figure is a solid starting number for estimating the number of individuals who maintain an active membership or are in active attendance in a congregation, placing well over half of the county population in personal contact with active church networks. Of those 60,906 individuals, an overwhelming majority (45,987, or 47.75% of the total overall population) are Evangelical Protestants, making this category of religious adherents over three times more populous than Black Protestants,[10] Catholics, and Mainline Protestants combined.

Polk County, Georgia. Polk County, Georgia is another Northwest Georgia county situated on the Alabama border. Polk County is adjacent to Cherokee and Cleburne counties in Alabama and four counties in Georgia: Bartow, Floyd, Haralson, and Paulding. Polk County includes three cities: Cedartown (the county seat), Aragon, and Rockmart. According to US Census data on Polk County, Cedartown had a population of 9,750 as of 2010, while Rockmart recorded 4,199, and Aragon noted only 1,249 residents. Overall, the United States Census Bureau estimates Polk County's population at 41,524 in a total of 14,778 households, meaning that most residents lived in the unincorporated areas of the county. Polk County is slightly less affluent than Floyd County, with a median household income of $39,121 and a per capita income of $18,773. Within the total county population of 41,524, 83.6% report themselves in the 'White Alone' racial category. Only 13% of the population

[10] That is to say, congregations that are members of one of the historically black denominations (Galiatsatos, Lehmijoki-Gardner, and Hale 2015).

assigning themselves to the next most prominent category, 'Black or African American Alone.' Polk County's population is lower, less dense and more homogeneously white compared to Floyd's, which leads to less visible minority representation.

Returning to the ARDA data, Polk County is recorded with 25,472 religious adherents out of a total 2010 population of 41,475 as measured via the ARDA methods discussed above. Of those 25,472 individuals, all are Christian except for seven individuals of the Bahá'í faith. Of those 25,472 religious adherents, 18,286 (44.09% of the overall population) are Evangelical Protestants. Once again, Evangelical Protestantism dwarfs other Christian faiths and alternate religions in proportion of recorded adherents.

Walker County, Georgia. Walker County, situated on Georgia's Alabama and Tennessee borders, abuts Hamilton County in Tennessee, DeKalb County in Alabama, and Catoosa, Chattooga, Dade, Floyd, Gordon, and Whitfield Counties in Georgia. Walker County houses several cities including LaFayette, the county seat, with a population of 7,121; Chickamauga, with a population of 3,101; Lookout Mountain, with a population of 1,602; and Rossville, with a population of 4,105. The county also includes several prominent unincorporated communities such as Flintstone, Naomi, and Villanow. As a whole, the US Census Bureau estimates Walker County's population at 68,066, 93% of whom place themselves in the racial category 'White Alone.' The next largest group, claiming the designation 'Black or African American alone,' records a composition of only 4.5%.

Walker County's religious adherence data from ARDA lists 38,296 individual adherents, of which five individuals are of the Bahá'í faith, and the rest are Christian. Of those 38,296 adherents, 34,045 (about 50% of the total population) are Evangelical Protestants. While Walker County's Evangelical Protestant religious adherents once again outnumber those from other faiths, it is also notable that in the three counties discussed so far, the raw number of Evangelical Protestants also outstrips the number of what ARDA terms Unclaimed — that is to say individuals who are not claimed by any of the ARDA recording partners. Thus, the data reveals the area to be overwhelmingly White and Evangelical. By extension, White Evangelical Protestants have a strong influence on the general norms and values of the area.

Religiosity in Northwest Georgia

As the above section shows, Evangelical Protestant Christianity has a large number of registered adherents in the area, with the potential for even greater adherence due to the limitations of the sampling system used by the Association of Religion Data Archives. Evangelical Protestant Christian adherence, like the whiteness discussed in chapter 1, while not universal, acts as a social monolith due to its unreflexively accepted nature as normative in the region, exemplified by Christian symbolism on businesses such as this pharmacy [Image RC1] and local outrage over legal attempts to separate Christianity and public institutions, including efforts to remove Christian bible verses from public high school structures and monuments (Groboski 2014, Hallowell 2014), to stop public prayer lead by school officials before public high school sporting events (CBS46 News 2012), to halt local Christian

church groups invited to public high school events to pray and baptize student athletes (Church & State 2015), and to remove Christian Bible verses from school forms and rosters (Stewart 2014). Area residents opposing the removals in both the articles themselves and in the open-forum comments frame their dissent in terms of the area being 'God-fearing' and the practices being important to the whole community, as in the comment on the CBS46 article that any limitation on the display of Christian verses or prayer on public property is an attack on their freedom (Dixon 2014). Dissenters even name detractors as antichrist (Hallowell).

While the above examples illustrate Christian thoughts on education and athletics rather than death, these instances also show the pervasiveness and force of Evangelical Protestant Christian thought in the public landscape in Northwest Georgia. This encroachment of thought is intrinsic to the Evangelical Protestant Christian movement, which has emerged as the 'normative form of American Protestant Christianity' (Brown 2016: 13). Omri Elisha categorizes Evangelical Protestant Christianity as

> a model of sociality (that is, how social connections are formed and maintained) that stresses the virtues of radical interdependence among people of faith. This imperative is crucial when it comes to how evangelicals inhabit the world as Christians, and how they guard themselves from sin and other forces that might cause spiritual harm or impede the mission of the church…. [B]eing part of a Christian community, for many US evangelicals, means entering into voluntary social networks where one is expected to become closely implicated in the lives of others. It is a relational dynamic that must be nurtured and upheld with commitment and vigilance. Prayer, fasting, and biblical immersion are common methods for bolstering faith… but they are not the only means at evangelical's disposal. Relationships built on transparency, and the monitoring of the self and other, are enacted as vehicles of spiritual discipline, mediating biblical truth and the power of the Holy Spirit…. Marked by terms such as 'fellowship' and 'discipleship,' evangelical sociality is a religious end unto itself, in which familiar conditions of personhood are revised to promote new configurations of the self and the other. (2015: 42–43)

Because of the large number of evangelicals in the region, the social model Elisha outlines has a pervasive impact on the social norms of the area and the social lives of individual residents. During my fieldwork, it was common to see Mainline Protestants[11] as well as unchurched individuals[12] adopting the evangelical ideas of fellowship and discipleship mentioned above and socially connecting in a method that, far from being exclusively evangelical, was considered to be simply Christian or Southern Christian, thus broadening Elisha's notions of evangelical sociality.

Popular Culture

Introduction

In a funerary context, well-known symbols can morph, change, and take on new meanings, and standard, everyday items can acquire fresh symbolic meaning (Halsall 1998: 329). The practice of shifting the status of common items, and awareness of that practice, is an important tool in various popular culture genres — that is to say eclectic, mainstream cultural engagement with, and the creation and evocation of, scene and emotive response, usually via mediated experiences (Danesi

[11] A Mainline Protestant is a member of a church in one of the following denominations, known as the Seven Sisters of American Protestantism: the United Methodist Church (UMC), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PCUSA), the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Churches, the United Church of Christ (Congregationalist), and the Disciples of Christ. Mainline Protestants were the majority denominations in America until the mid-twentieth century and are considered more politically and theologically liberal than contemporary American Evangelical Churches and denominations. For further reading see Jason S. Lantzer, *Mainline Christianity: The Past and Future of America's Majority Faith*. New York: New York UP, 2012.

[12] *Unchurched* was a common term during my research fieldwork. At its most basic, the unchurched are individuals who do not regularly attend Christian religious services and are not regularly participating members of another faith or practice (Stanley 2016). However, as this somewhat places them outside of evangelical sociality, regularly church-attending members of the community may have mixed feelings about the unchurched. Other members of the community see the unchurched simultaneously as lapsed Christians needing to be brought back into the fold and as people needing conversion and proselytization (see Rainer 2007).

2015: 6). Pop culture, while being a constructed form of engagement and thus not 'representative' or 'authentic' when compared with direct participant-observation[13], displays provocative insights into contemporary culture, while also creating expectations that consumers expect to be replicated in their daily lives (see Mahiri 2001, Detweiler and Taylor: 2003).

This section performs a social-research based evaluation of popular-culture media accounts of funeral food and attempts to map an embedded vernacular meta-understanding—visual, aural, and narrative — of American Southern postmortem and funeral-food traditions, while simultaneously acknowledging the edited and restricted nature of popular culture. This evaluation provides background context to this research, but is also deeply connected to the digital ethnography of blogs and private websites, as both are mediated accounts. However, the contemporaneity of the blogs, along with their personal voice and the richness of their accounts, makes them a useful introduction to the food and funeral-food practices of the fieldwork area, and so blogs are presented later in this work, in chapter 5. While there is little documentation of Southern funeral-food practices from the dominant culture, the South has a long and lauded artistic past where artists have documented aspects of their lives and the lives of their characters, which includes funeral-food traditions. A such, mediated representations of funeral food-traditions can simultaneously show aspects of the past, due to the need for verisimilitude in a believable narrative, as

[13] Participant observation is often considered to be constructed too, see: Ann Bonner and Gerda Tolhurst. 'Insider-outsider Perspectives of Participant Observation.' *Nurse researcher* 9.4 (2002): 7-19; Mario Liong. 'In the Shadow of Deception: Ethical Dilemma, Positionality, and Reflexivity in Ethnographic Fieldwork.' *Qualitative Research Journal* 15.1 (2015): 61-73; Farhana Sultana. 'Reflexivity, Positionality and Participatory Ethics: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas in International Research.' *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 6.3 (2007): 374-385.

well as serve as examples of media that contemporary peoples are engaging with that reinforce on the ground, lived experiences.

Funeral Food in Southern Film

Motion pictures are specifically crafted to be consumed by viewers. Because of this produced and crafted quality, movies cannot be considered authentic ethnographic representations of events that happen in the field. However, in films where the production team desires a high degree of verisimilitude, not only may the action seem realistic and genuine to viewers, but also these movies may act as a locus for visual learning (Laptev, et al. 2008). Visual learning is a learning style based on visual data, in which individuals learn not only by overt instruction but via interpreting images, symbols, and actions they observe (Leite, Svinicki, and Yuying 2009: 2). As long as the information presented is accurate and not overly altered or redacted, visual data can be an effective means of communicating complex ideas (Barak, Ashkar, and Dori 2011). Due to this aspect of visual learning, movies have gained popularity as tools in more formalized education (see Villalba and Redmond 2008, Sprau and Keig 2001). Thus, the movies addressed below may be seen as points of special interest to the discussion of Southern funeral food.

***Places in the Heart* (1989).** Robert Benton's 1989 Academy Award–winning movie *Places in the Heart* stars Sally Field as Edna Spalding, a widow bereaved early in the film, who struggles to maintain her family's cohesion and property in Texas during the Great Depression. The culminating scene of the movie depicts the members of the town, living and dead, accepted and spurned, partaking in communion together in

the local church (1:46:02). The focus on depicting the Eucharistic bread and grape juice brings resolution to all of the characters. Otis Carl Edwards, Jr. claims, however, that while 'All were reconciled, [sic] all were in communion[, t]he minister was reading 1 Corinthians 13. Thus, the resolution was ultimately not in history but beyond it. The resolution was in God' (Edwards 1990: 91).

However, *Places in the Heart* is a movie constructed around mirrored scenes, and traditional hymns soar over both the final scene and the opening. Given this mirrored structure, there must be an early scene serving as the literary foil to the final communion. If the Holy Communion symbolically re-enacts the Last Supper of Christ and the disciples, the analog early in the movie must be the final supper Edna's family sits down to, which her husband leaves and never returns as alive. If this meal is aborted because of his death, it is finished in truth with the return of his dead body. The Depression-influenced family meal is sparse; fried chicken is served with green beans, mashed potatoes, and homemade dinner rolls [figure PitH 1] (0:03:56). However, although the father's accidental death disrupts this familial communion, the intimacy that dinner promises is consummated by the community as a whole in the final Eucharistic scene.

After the father's death, community members deliver Edna's husband's body back to the family farm; from that moment on, members of the community fill the house. While the film does not specifically depict community members arriving with dishes of food, food gifts from the greater community are present throughout the scene. Just hours after the body is returned home, while Edna and her sister wash the husband's body, the farmstead's kitchen is filled with food (0:14:07) [figure PitH 2]. The muted, neutral tones of the scene are echoed in the brown and golden hues of the

freshly cooked food. With the exception of a large number of cakes, the types of food remain constant from the earlier table: Fried chicken, freshly baked biscuits, cornbread, dinner rolls, peas, green beans, potatoes, and other everyday Southern foodstuffs abound, all appearing quickly and in great abundance. An elderly man eating a whole plate of food dominates the frame; women work in the background and children in the foreground share a plate while looking intently at the sweets. Unlike the formal environment depicted in figure PitH 1, in figure PitH 2 food is served in pleasant looking but mismatched mixing bowls and the pans the food items were cooked in. People eat while both standing and sitting, and places of repose seem determined only by availability. The small hum of social chatter pervades the soundtrack as the community women wash the dishes this influx of food creates, and the scene implies more female labor created the food itself (0:14:25).

When Edna slips away to the screened-in back porch for some privacy, her sister Margaret brings her a slice of cake, pre-cut and arranged in the kitchen for ease of serving, while insisting to Edna that eating remains important, leaving the "in times like this" unspoken but implied (0:14:40) [figure PitH 3]. The provenance of the dish — 'Marie Thornton made that…it's real good' — allows the two bereaved women to begin speaking in this difficult moment (0:14:56). The offering of food is an act of physical affection by Margaret towards her recently widowed sister, as well as an opportunity for the women to discuss the significance of the death and the personal implications it will have on the newly altered family. Just as the process is a shift in status marking the husband's movement from a living member of the community to a dead one, so too does this gathering give Edna the space to contemplate her new role as primary breadwinner for her struggling family.

Places in the Heart also shows a small glimpse into the continuation of the funeral-food tradition after the funeral. Just as figure PitH 2 depicts family and community members descending on the bereaved's home in preparation for a funeral, figure PitH 4 shows the remnants after the final few non-familial guests leave after the funeral (0:17:40). Still dressed in the plain, black dress worn to the graveside funeral service, Edna clears away plates of cake and saucers and cups of tea and coffee. The camera follows Edna as she walks through the house, and the frame focuses on her sister, Margaret, standing at the sink washing dishes. Even though Margaret is not a resident of the home, she states 'Lord I thought those people were never going to leave,' placing herself in a separate category from the previous guests as a close family member (0:17:45) [figure PitH 5]. The kitchen countertops hold a large quantity of dishes in various sizes and patterns. As figure PitH 1 shows, the family's dishes consisted of a formal set with matching pattern. The variety of dishware in figure PitH 5 suggests that members of the greater community brought the dishes themselves from outside the home. Likewise, the volume and variety of dishware suggest mixed usage. While the leftovers we observe Edna clearing away in figure PitH 4 may only display dessert items, the washed and unwashed dishware in figure PitH 5 suggests an entire meal provided by and consumed with the community.

***Steel Magnolias* (1987 and 1989).** Scholar Deborah Barker considers *Steel Magnolias* to exemplify postfeminist Southern chick flicks (2008: 94), meaning Barker considers *Steel Magnolias* to be primarily about female relationships and bonding, 'responding simultaneously to feminist principles and to the backlash

mentality, and that the southern setting facilitates the sleight of hand necessary to negotiate this contradictory impulse' (2008: 92). Robert Harling wrote *Steel Magnolias* as a play in 1987; Herbert Ross produced and released it as a film in 1989. Set in Louisiana and centered on a mother-daughter relationship, *Steel Magnolias* can be considered a quintessential Southern woman's film (Tyler 1994). The film is so thematically linked with women's lives that almost all of the action occurs in traditional women's spaces or at family events and locations where women traditionally preside (Barker 2008: 96). However, even though the movie emotionally culminates at a funeral, and even though, as I address in other parts of this thesis, the after-funeral meal is traditionally a family location where women preside[14], very little of the visual narrative depicts funeral food. However, for those who know and understand the tradition, the funeral meal is coded as present. In figure SM 1, Annelle, a friend of the family, brings M'Lynn and Truvy, another family friend, a mug of coffee after M'Lynn's daughter's funeral (1:43:20). Mourners can be seen in the background at the start of the scene and as Annelle walks through the frame. The mugs themselves are solid, plain, and serviceable, but not the kind of cup that would be expected to serve to guests. The choice of drink appears incongruous with the warm fall day, on which the recipients sit outdoors with no indications of cold and M'Lynn in a light cardigan, and seem instead to indicate Southern social mores around alcohol and beverage consumption in public.[15]

[14] For more on this see chapter 8.

[15] On the alcohol and beverage consumption in Southern funeral-food traditions see 'Funeral Food as Resurrection in the American South,' in *Dying to Eat: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the Role of Food in Dying, Death, and Afterlives*, ed. Candi Cann (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, forthcoming).

Additionally, as Annelle passes, men of the family and the wider social group can be seen clustered in a small group engaged in quiet conversation. While no traditional funeral food is displayed on-screen, all of the other markers of a traditional Southern post-funeral meal are on display. The participants are still in their clothing from the graveside ceremony, and the family home is open for guests to come and go as they please. This is made more evident when M'Lynn's other friends, Clairee and Ouiser, arrive to once again pay their respects to M'Lynn.

***Sordid Lives* (2000).** Del Shores's *Sordid Lives*, a dark comedy set in Texas, provided one of the best examples in film of the contemporary American South funeral-food tradition. *Sordid Lives*, an independent film from 2000 in which the humor is derived from juxtaposing examples of Southern propriety and eccentricity, revolves around the events following the death of the matriarch of a working- to lower-middle class white family, who died during an adulterous liaison with a neighbor's husband. Shores's corpus revolves around the central concepts of conformity, 'the problem of nonconformity in the fundamentalist evangelical South in general, and the problematic intersection of homosexuality and conservative Christian culture in particular' (Harrison 2009: 125). *Sordid Lives* displays most cultural signifiers appropriate to a funeral in the Southern United States, including the gifting and consumption of funeral-food items. The first scene featuring any funeral preparation, planning or explanation depicts the delivery of a food gift by an unseen community member to the deceased's sister, who was raised more like a daughter (0:6:25). Sissy, the sister, accepts the food gift, in what appears to be a mint green Pyrex bowl loosely covered with plastic cling film, and sets it on a kitchen

table already brimming with food. The food already present on the table, consisting of traditional funeral-food fares such as apple pie and fried chicken, is also, at least partially covered with plastic cling film, creating a visually consistent narrative with the new food gift [figure SL 1]. Likewise, several plates remain stacked on the table, seeming to await the arrival of guests who will partake in the food offerings.

Sissy then works to tidy away used cutlery, a glass, and a plate with food remnants consistent with what is on offer on the table. This could be seen as Sissy's singular consumption, which would not be out of line with Southern funeral-food traditions; however, during the cleaning process, what could be already soiled cutlery and glasses creates a visual narrative of ongoing, intermittent consumption [figure SL 2]. In a later scene, Noleta, the wife of the man with whom Sissy's sister was having an elicit encounter at a seedy motel when she died, brings another food gift to Sissy (0:09:45). While distraught herself over her husband's infidelity, upon arrival Noleta presents Sissy with a Pyrex bowl loosely cover with plastic cling wrap, which she immediately identifies as her 'Momma's Tuna Casserole. You know the one [Noleta] always make[s] with the Lays potato chips and the cream of mushroom soup' (0:9:54). The food gift is named and described by its association with a particular person (Momma's Tuna Casserole), even though it is now Noleta's habit to make and provide the dish. Noleta's mother, otherwise absent from the entirety of the movie, is injected into the narrative through the food gift. While the two women discuss the situation and Noleta praises the deceased despite the situation, Noleta, unprompted stands and makes herself a plate of food (0:10:49). Sissy treats this as unremarkable, and after Noleta finishes her food (during an unrepresented scene), Sissy offer to 'get [her] a little refill,' and makes her a plate of dessert (0:12:30). This

pattern of guests arriving and sharing food with Sissy is repeated. When Sissy's niece, Latrelle, arrives not long after Noleta leaves, she makes both Sissy and herself a plate of food (0:20:50). Again, she does so without wondering about the propriety of the situation or the provenance of the food. In fact, Latrelle is shown to be an insider to the tradition when, instinctively and without prompting, she looks at the underside of a dish of apple pie for the name of the person who provided the offering (0:21:51) [figure SL 3].[16] Latrelle's comfort is important to the understanding of both the scene and the tradition. Latrelle is fastidious and overly concerned with the appearance of propriety, qualities that define her role in the narrative. Her easy interaction with the food shows the rightness that the food's presence conveys.

A similar interaction happens with the entrance of Latrelle's sister LaVonda (0:29:20). After LaVonda acknowledges Latrelle and Sissy, she quickly turns to the table and notes 'Ooh wee, look at all of this food', before getting herself a piece of fried chicken to eat (0:30:10). While Latrelle is concerned only with their mother's dress at the impending funeral, Sissy makes the point of informing LaVonda that her friend Noleta arrived early and brought a tuna casserole, an act that LaVonda seems to appreciate. The casserole is such an iconic item that it even appears in the credits, reinforcing its importance to Noleta, the overall setting of the film, and, by contextualizing it with other objects added in the credits, such as cowboy hats and guitars, its encapsulation of a sense of Southern-ness (1:47:24) [figure SL 4].

Elizabethtown (2005). *Elizabethtown*, the 2005 film by Cameron Crowe starring Kristin Dunst and Orlando Bloom, also features Paula Deen (who will be discussed

[16] This action will be linked to the habit explored in chapter 6 of individuals' affixing their names via labels to the tableware they expect to be returned to them after the bereavement period.

in more depth later in this chapter). Bloom portrays Drew Baylor, an emotionally distant, urbane young man from Oregon who must travel to Elizabethtown, Kentucky to retrieve the remains of his father, who died while visiting relatives. While the characters in the movie never overtly discuss the tradition of funeral-food gifts, moments of food gifting and locations where food gifts are given define several scenes in the film. In figure E1, visitors arrive in family groups, carrying covered dishes, at what seems to be the deceased's sister's home (0:31:50).[17] This focus on family is repeated throughout the movie. Children play together, but they are with the rest of the family, sharing space and thus sharing in the traditions. Likewise, figure E1 depicts two men chatting in what appears to be a multigenerational social exchange. In all of the *Elizabethtown* scenes featuring funeral food, the exchange of food facilitates intergenerational conversation about both the recent, and in at least at times the distant, deceased (0:34:24).

Figure E2 depicts an elderly man entering carrying a neutral colored baking dish covered with plastic cling film (0:32:04), one of the several examples of individuals arriving with covered dishes (see 0:32:09 for a second example). Figure E2 is particularly interesting for several reasons: The individual arriving with the food gift is a male presenting person, in contrast with both figure E1 and the other movies this dissertation addresses, in which food gifts come from women or family units.[18] The gentleman, later identified as a member of the local American Legion, announces that he is arriving with Kentucky Hash Brown Casserole. Before making

[17] The character is referred to as Aunt Dora throughout the narrative. Her lifelong interest in family photography implies that she is a member of the family by blood, not marriage, and the movie script confirms that she is part of the family (Crowe: p42). However, she could be a great-aunt. Nonetheless, her appearance and treatment are more in line with the deceased's contemporaries.

[18] However, as cooking is normally considered a gendered act of labor (Poortman and Van Der Lippe 2009), food gifted by a family unit, unless otherwise noted, is assumed to be an act of female labor.

this claim, he says something that is obscured by the movie soundtrack and which seems to have been improvised, as it does not appear in the script. He seems to be saying a woman's name as the creator of the dish (possibly Barbra Henley). If this is the case, the presentation of the food gift would better fit with other observances of funeral-food gifts. Behind the man, a woman can be seen helping herself at a table full of covered dishes. Figure E3 shows two other tables laden with covered dishes (0:33:56). In figures E2, E3, and scenes surrounding them, dishes include casseroles (including the already mentioned hash brown casserole), baked ham, deviled eggs, biscuits, hoe cakes, chess pie, and a variety of sweet desserts. Drew is visibly overwhelmed, and a quick succession of frames representing Drew's gaze shows that both the mass of food and mass of people are outside of his experience as an Oregonian (0:32:44) [figure E4]. The previous scene established Drew's lack of familiarity with death rituals and dead bodies, while all other members present — that is to say, those presented as authentically Southern — have an ease and familiarity with the presence and customs of death (0:28:50; Crowe: 39–40).

Figure E5 shows a fourth table in the same household with still more food. While Drew sits at the table discussing the memorial plans with the influential men of the community and the women are cooking and cleaning in the adjacent kitchen, what appears to be three different cakes and what is possibly a gravy boat of custard are shown (1:05:58). The food is treated as a character, taking up space at the table's two empty seats. The frame shifts, taking the viewers' gaze over the plates of cake, whiskey tumblers, and cups of coffee. A detritus of consumed meals, used napkins, and disposable plates are scattered around the men. The women re-enter the scene only through the food — that is to say, to refill the mugs of coffee, bring in extra

bottles of fizzy soda pop, and clear away the plates. The consumption of the funeral-food gifts is an active, ongoing process. Not merely confined to specific mealtimes, food becomes both location and activity for those grieving.

August: Osage County (2013). *August: Osage County*, a 2013 movie based on the Pulitzer-Prize-winning play of the same name, is, like the play, a contemporary work written in a style of American theatrical production popular in the early twentieth-century that focused on isolated, dysfunctional family dynamics (Friedman 2015: 15). Oklahoma, the setting for *August: Osage County,* is considered by some metrics to be a Southern state, but it occupies a unique place in the American landscape (Bailey 1997: 257), existing as a marginal zone between the South and the Midlands aptly named the South Midlands, which is influenced by both cultural areas, choosing, modifying, and discarding social cues and traditions from both of the larger homogenous groups (US Accent Map; Jacewicz, Fox, and Salmons 2011: 684, 685). Thus Oklahoma, and as a depiction of the state *August: Osage County,* displays some, but not all, of the Southern funeral-food traditions discussed in this thesis. Still, food features as an important aspect of the funerary rituals depicted. Elizabeth Fifer writes that 'Once Beverly's [the family's patriarch] suicide is established the wake begins. The family shields their vulnerability through alcohol that fuels the ritual and brings forth memory — and not only of the dead father' (2013: 191). This theme of an individual's death triggering memories of other, previous deaths and creating a continuity of memories will be investigated in the later chapters of this study.

As in the other films, with tragedy arrives food. Mattie Fae, the sister of Violet, the recently bereaved family matriarch, arrives with her husband Charlie—both with arms loaded with food (12:01) [figure AOC1]. When Mattie Fae hugs her niece, who greets her in the yard, she is still holding a cake and has a bag of groceries hanging from her arm. The food is literally included in the familial embrace, and Charlie repeats the same food-inclusive hug. However, figure AOC2 markedly departs from the previous films in its depiction of alcohol. While alcohol was not absent from all of the earlier films — *Sordid Lives* and *Elizabethtown* included representations of alcohol — it was not centrally located as part of the official, familial mourning in either composition or dialog in those films. However, Mattie Fae and Charlie have a discussion about alcohol, questioning the appropriateness of beer versus whiskey during a period of solemnity. The scenes from figures AOC1 and AOC2 both correspond to food gifts in the interim period of Beverly's official status as a missing person before his funeral. While the food is not truly an aspect of a funerary ritual at this point, it can be considered part of the family's mortuary ritual.

Food appears later in the consecutive scenes shown in figures AOC3 through AOC5. In AOC3, food once again appears as a gift when a character arrives at the family home—this time, Little Charles arrives with his mother Mattie Fae's casserole as a food gift. This is significant in that the other post-funeral foods were prepared by the family's hired domestic help. Even though plenty of food had been provided already, Mattie Fae felt providing a personalized food gift for the meal was important. When that casserole dish is destroyed [figure AOC4], symbolizing the fractured family, Mattie Fae's furious reaction highlights just how highly she values

her food gift as well as just how lowly she regards her son. While figure AOC5 shows unusual behavior in the Southern funeral-food context in having the post-funeral meal in a formal, sit-down environment, some traditional foodstuffs such as casseroles are displayed.

Funeral Food in Southern Writing

Since the earliest defenses of English literature, writing has been acknowledged as a space not only to delight with whimsy, but also to teach lessons about human nature and act as a locus of education (Sidney 1890). More recently, social researchers have turned to literary works to show social systems. Fernando Poyatos writes:

> The interdisciplinary research area of *Literary Anthropology* […] is based on the anthropologically-oriented use of the *narrative literatures* of the different cultures (and, in a lesser degree, their theatre, chronicles and travel accounts), as they constitute the richest sources of documentation for both synchronic and diachronic analyses of people's ideas and behaviours. From the early epics to the contemporary novel, the various types of realism we can differentiate can be systematically studied as invaluable sources, often the only ones (beyond the limitations of representational art forms) for the documentation of (a) *sensible systems* … and (b) *intelligible systems*: from religious thought, rituals and celebrations, through social patterns of relationships, moral values, etiquette, household activities, etc., to politics, folklore, popular beliefs, games and the arts (1988: xii-xiii)

Poyatos argues that no matter the degree of poetic or functional language, as long as the author seeks verisimilitude, or as Poyatos is more likely to say as long as the style or genre engages with the real or realism, observations about the nature of language and culture in that created and for the author can be drawn (1988: 6). Čale-Feldman more succinctly describes literary anthropology as 'the practice of reading of literary meanings which try to concentrate on finding traces of referential cultural context in

literary texts' (1997: 102). Thomas Winner uses this system in his analysis of the Czech work *The Good Soldier Švejk* by Jaroslav Hašek, arguing that while the study of literature elucidates in an 'oblique fashion,' literature displays specific mores of its inception and 'is related to extra-literary cultural phenomena in an attuned and transformed manner' (1988: 61, 51).

Literary anthropology not only serves as a gateway to examining a unique data form showing specific cultural ideas and practices embedded in a specific time and place (Trumpener and Nyce 1988), but it also has the ability to show changes in those ideas and practices over time, especially when no other longitudinal data exists (Botscharow 1988). Acknowledging that literary analysis cannot replace more traditional data collection methods but only supplement them, literary anthropology can bridge gaps in traditional social research, opening up all forms of naturalistic writings to the social research impulse (Pisac 2010: 272).

Twentieth-Century Southern Fiction and Funeral Food. Though death is a perennial literary topic, funerals have never had the same literary ubiquity, and examples of Southern funeral-food traditions are rarer still. From 1943 to 1944, Allen Tate served as the United States' Poet Laureate; just five years before his tenure as Poet Laureate, Tate published his only novel, *The Fathers*. Published a decade after his most famous poem, 'Ode to the Confederate Dead,' and thematically linked with it, Tate's *The Fathers* is a solipsistic narrative drawing on familial knowledge that engages with the run-up to and outbreak of the American Civil War. Tate, perhaps the most liberal member of the Southern Fugitive Poets and Southern Agrarians, a loose assembly of Southern writers dedicated to "tradition," both

engages with and simultaneously avoids displaying funeral traditions during his opening chapter in *The Fathers* (Koch 1949). In the novel, Tate engages with the Civil War as a symbolic representation of the struggles inherent in the 1930s South, and as such the cultural symbols and practices displayed in the narrative simultaneously indicate both times and neither (Kreyling 1990: 193). More to the point, the practices can be seen as an adult child's retelling of images from his parents' childhoods. However, his view of the South also allowed for a South that was able to escape both poverty and modernity (Davis 2013: 102).

Perhaps this is why depictions of funeral rituals are so inconsistent in the novel. The story told from the narrator Lacy's point of view; Tate depicts Lacy's viewing of his mother's body in the front parlor in some detail, but omits such details as the exact number of attendees or a description of the composition of the 'flowery pall' (1938: 103). So too are funeral foods given limited attention. However, a close reading brings some details of the funeral-food tradition to the surface. In the novel's opening paragraph, Lacy states that he can 'still taste the salt of the roe herring that Aunt Maya Parrish had kept serving to the kin and friends from Washington and Alexandria' (1938: 19). Already some pertinent details can be gleaned: The serving of food is relegated to Aunt Maya, an older female relative from outside of the household. The food is not understood as coming from Major Buchan, Lacy's father, even though his slaves prepare it, nor from Lacy's elder sister, even though she is an adult at the time of her mother's death.

The only other instance of funeral-food consumption Tate shows is Lacy's Uncle Armistead receiving toddies from his personal slave as he sits in vigil beside his sister-in-law's coffin (1938: 21). So, while Tate does not spend many words on

funeral-food traditions specifically, we do see some aspects of it inherent in the context. In Tate's work, slave labor, not food gifts, creates the bulk of food the guests consume. There is, however, an expectation that those traveling to the funeral will be provided food. Alcohol is present and acceptable, and, at least in Tate's narrative, it is an older female member of the extended family who takes charge and provides the food, allowing the immediate family, including the deceased's adult daughter, greater freedom to mourn.

In 1925, thirteen years before Tate published *The Fathers*, Ellen Glasgow published her novel *Barren Ground.* While Tate would later influence Glasgow's writing, this era represented the beginning of her awareness and association with him (Caldwell 1984). Although her novel was published before Tate's, Glasgow's novel was a contemporary piece spanning about thirty years in her characters' lives and ended roughly around the book's publication date. Glasgow, who later won the Pulitzer Prize in 1942 for her last novel *In This Our Life*, was viewed by some as too regional. She wrote strong depictions of the American South, especially her home state of Virginia, which were well received by the Southern Agrarians (aligning her with Tate), and influenced a generation of Southern writers including Eudora Welty and William Faulkner, who will be discussed later in this section (Goodman 1998: 168).

Barren Ground is Glasgow's most critically acclaimed novel, but while much attention has been paid to the characterization of its protagonist, Dorinda Oakley, little attention has been given to the novel's overall meaning or social depiction outside of the Southern Agrarian model and motifs (Bunch 2001: 14). In *Barren Ground*, Glasgow creates a new pastoral model for Southern women, while

simultaneously challenging the assumed role of women in the new South, as Glasgow's Dorinda works valiantly to save her family's farm after her father's death and succeeds spectacularly (Harrison 1990: 57). In a novel with so many deaths and corresponding funerals centering on a female protagonist, one might expect to see greater examples of the gendered Southern funeral food. However, perhaps due to Glasgow's expositional style, this is not the case.

That being said, some instances of Southern funeral-food traditions once again bleed through.[19] For example, when Dorinda leaves home and is job hunting in New York City, a kindly shopkeeper offers her a cup of tea. The narrator informs the reader that, '[a]t Pedlar's Mill tea was not used except in illness or bereavement, and [Dorinda] was not prepared for the immediate consolation it afforded her' (Glasgow 1925: 208). Here, we see a specific foodstuff assigned special status as a food of bereavement. However, although Dorinda is the primary mourner in several funerals in Pedlar's Mill later in the story, we never see her or anyone else consume tea again. Instead, Dorinda is shown to have very little specific interaction with funeral food, though its presence is implied. At her husband's death, Dorinda has the following exchange with her step-daughter:

> 'Don't you think I ought to make them stop?' Minnie May asked presently [in reference to her children playing on the floor]. 'They'd be more at home, anyway, in the kitchen where Fluvanna is making gingerbread for them.'
>
> 'Tell Fluvanna not to forget to bring in some blackberry wine and cake,' Dorinda whispered in reply.
>
> Before she had spoken to her first visitor the parlour was crowded (1925: 451)

[19] Southern Funeral Foods come up in the context of these novels, as a given that needs no exposition, and so are not as blatant as film examples, 'Today's reader is apt to find himself or herself puzzling over references to aspects of everyday English life that are now long vanished but that the contemporary author took for granted his—contemporary—audience knew' in Daniel Pool. *What Jane Austen ate and Charles Dickens knew: from Fox Hunting to Whist-the facts of daily life in nineteenth-century England*. (New York: Touchstone, 1994): 13.

As Dorinda receives guests in her home, she happens to glance out the window and sees ‘Fluvanna coming from the hen-house with a bunch of fowls in her hand. With her usual foresight, the girl … was preparing supper for the multitude’ (1925: 454).

Although the black workers in Glasgow’s novel are servants now, as opposed to the slaves in Tate’s work, it is still their labor that creates the actual funeral food provided to those visiting the bereaved in the home of the deceased. As in Tate’s work, alcohol is present and socially appropriate. In another incident, Glasgow demonstrates the extent to which food around funerals is a social expectation: After paying for the funeral of a former lover who had died destitute, Dorinda invites the only other mourner at the funeral back to her home for coffee even though she hopes he will refuse (1925: 520). Glasgow depicts Dorinda as bound by social obligation and expectation.

Although food is an important element of William Faulkner’s 1930 stream-of-consciousness novel *As I Lay Dying*, funeral-food traditions are mostly unrepresented in the work. Like Fannie Flagg in the 1987 novel *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe*, Faulkner mentions the neighbors’ gathering at the home of the deceased after the matriarch’s death, but no specific mention is made of food at the gathering. Thus, only the meal of greens immediately following the matriarch’s death may be seen as anything similar to other depictions of funeral food. The book, however, is a satire, and according to literary scholar Elizabeth Kerr, the meal continues over the course of the novel:

> Anse’s teeth and the other prizes won in Jefferson are associated with food: at the end the Bundrens contentedly munch bananas, the one dream realized for the whole family. How Faulkner could have forgotten the cokes, to complete the ritual, I cannot imagine. Mrs. Tull’s cakes, the ‘sacramental’ meal of fish and turnip greens, and the

> basket of food carried on the journey, supplemented by kindly hosts, provide a series of references to sustain the food ritual until the climax, the bananas (Kerr 1962: 12).

It should be noted that the Bundrens are a family at odds with society, and so this omission does not mean as much as it would in another novel. Indeed, this satirical depiction of funeral food is meant to subvert the dominant social structure and narrative. Nonetheless, subverting a paradigm means re-presenting it in some manner, and elements of funeral-food traditions can be read into the narrative, as the extract from Kerr's work shows.

Eudora Welty's 1972 Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel *The Optimist's Daughter*, however, deals explicitly with Southern funeral-food traditions. Welty's novel differs from the books previously discussed in key aspects. Although the McKelva family profit from black labor in the person of Missouri, her presence is not tied to the home. Missouri's existence outside the home opens up other avenues of food production, especially in a sudden situation such as a surprise bereavement. Unlike *As I Lay Dying*, in Welty's novel, fixed point of view and linear temporal progression create a greater understanding of the protagonists' movement within and throughout their environment. Laurel displays both expectation and reaction in a way that is not simply internal to her character. Even characters that are displayed as socially marginal, such as the Chisom family, provide funeral-food gifts in fulfillment of a known tradition (Akins 2011: 93).

While it is not a main thematic focus of Welty's narrative, funeral food does appear as a material element of the narrative. When Laurel arrives back home after her father's death, the women of the community have food prepared for her and her stepmother Fay:

> Miss Tennyson led Laurel into the dining room. The bridesmaids [the collective term for Laurel's closest friends] had been setting out a buffet. On the little side table, where Major Bullock, standing with his back to them, was quickly finishing up something, was the drinks tray with some bottles and glasses…. 'You've got pies three deep in the pantry, and an icebox ready to pop,' said Miss Tennyson, going out to meet [Fay]. 'And a dining room table that might keep you from going to bed hungry.' (1972: 53)

Not only is the tradition shown, but it is partly explained. When Fay, an outsider in the community, demands to know why so many people are in her house, it is explained that they are there for Laurel, as friends of Laurel's father (the deceased), and in memory of Laurel's mother. Laurel herself adds that her father would have counted on them to be there and that Laurel herself expects and needs them there. Welty also shows the funeral-food gifting as a persistent tradition. The next day Laurel and Fay receive guests in the home to view Laurel's father's body. On arrival, the minister's wife tells Laurel that she had been saving her best Virginia ham for just such an occasion, and shares a story with Laurel about how Laurel's mother was the one who taught her how to cook the dish properly. Only then does she deliver the ham to the kitchen to be eaten.

Welty also gives a glimpse of the post-funeral meal. Women rush back to the McKelva home with clay from the cemetery still stuck to some of their shoes. Older ladies of the community (friends of Laurel's deceased mother) alongside Laurel's bridesmaids, themselves middle-aged, arrange plates of food and invite guests in on behalf of the bereaved family. Major Bullock makes drinks, such as a whiskey and water for Fay, and people eat as they mill about the home. The minister's wife takes some of her own ham on a Ritz cracker.

Welty shows a funeral-food tradition that is protracted and highly gendered. Over several days and interactions, women of the community are shown making food

gifts to the bereaved family in memory of the deceased and in honor of the remaining family members.

Southern Funeral-Food Fiction in the Long Twenty-First Century. Twentieth-century literature has cast a long shadow over contemporary writing. With luminaries such as Welty and Faulkner shaping contemporary authors' and audiences' understanding of death, dying, and funeral food, contemporary writing can both fall in line with previous styles and themes and discover unique niches. The 2001 Anthony Award winner for Best Paperback Mystery, *Dead Until Dark*, the first book in Charlaine Harris's Southern Vampire Mysteries series, displays funeral food in the style of Welty. Harris shows her protagonist Sookie Stackhouse and her brother receiving the community in her home after their grandmother's death. Harris's use of funeral food parallels Welty's: While funeral food is collectively mentioned in both works, individual dishes are mentioned only in relation to the women who have brought them. In Harris's novel, rather than Virginia Ham or Chicken Mousse, Maxine Fortenberry's deviled eggs and ham salad are called out.

Harris shows an individual bringing multiple funeral-food dishes because of both a close connection to the deceased and an elevated social role in the local community. She also shows the same socially elevated woman staying to clean the Stackhouse kitchen (2001: 150), just as Welty showed a socially prominent woman of the community staying to wash dishes after the funeral food had been consumed (1972: 54). However, while Welty mentions an icebox full of food for the McKelva family to consume during their bereavement, Harris more fully depicts such a scene. Three days after the funeral, Harris shows her protagonist Sookie still eating funeral

food, narrating ‘I didn’t feel hungry, but the clock told me it was time to eat. I went into the kitchen and pulled one of the many Tupperware containers from the refrigerator. It held turkey and grape salad, and I liked it, but I sat there at the table just picking at it with a fork. I gave up, returning it to the icebox and going to the bathroom for a much-needed shower’ (2001: 157–158). Harris shows Sookie utilizing the funeral-food gifts provided by members of the community to sustain herself through this listlessness.

While Harris depicts funeral food more or less in line with twentieth-century literary representations, the traditions surrounding funeral food in the American South have also received new treatment in contemporary works. Michael Lee West’s *Consuming Passions: A Food Obsessed Life* blends recipes with fictionalized and composite depictions of family and life events, creating a memoir in which she and the publishers admit fiction holds sway (1999: xi). Gayden Metcalfe and Charlotte Hays’s 2005 work, *Being Dead is no Excuse: The Official Southern Ladies Guide to Hosting the Perfect Funeral*, is of a similar vein, but neatly escapes the question and implications of the work’s veracity by being marketed as a cookbook; as such, it won the 2006 Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance Book Award for Best Cookbook. Unlike previous works, in which funeral-food narratives support the narrative and illustrate individuals’ specific interactions with the protagonists, West, Metcalfe, and Hays focus their works on the traditions surrounding funeral food, not only weaving in humorous stories of funeral traditions to invite personal engagement, but also presenting recipes as material connections to funeral-food traditions.

In West's book, an entire chapter is explicitly devoted to funeral-food traditions; funeral-food traditions are also mentioned as the primary or introductory objects of at least two other chapters and other food notions in West's fictionalized version of her life. West opens with a discussion at a funeral: 'Aunt Hettie pulled me aside and said, 'This is a shame! What a loss!' I thought she was speaking of the relative we were about to bury,' West writes, before informing the reader that Aunt Hettie's true concern was the loss of the deceased's gingerbread recipe. This leads the discussion to the supposed loss of West's grandmother's biscuit recipe, conversation about the recipe, and finally the recipe itself, which one member of the party still remembers and shares (1999: 7). The recipe for *Mimi's Buttermilk Biscuits* follows. Even outside of West's funeral-food chapter, an acknowledgment of the impact of funeral food on Southern cuisine and Southern lives begins to emerge in West's writing. West shows the recipes' beings passed from mother to daughter and a concomitant connection with both the past and future in this act. West also shows what while her daughter and granddaughter make the biscuits; they are still considered Mimi's buttermilk biscuits.

West opens a chapter about the importance of Coconut Cake as a Southern dish with a friend's fond memory of a particular Coconut Cake at a family funeral that 'sat on the mahogany sideboard, ruling over the chess pie and the checkerboard cakes' (1999: 93). Although funeral-food traditions were not the stated point of the chapter, they influence the narrative's shape and construction. West gives other instances of funeral food outside of the one dedicated chapter, including recipes passed to her at her father's funeral (1999: 104), home food cures for post-funeral

lethargy (1999: 143), and funeral food as a metaphor for solidity and dependability (1999: 183). West even recounts that when she bakes specific heirloom dishes,

> all of my forebears gather in the kitchen. Elizabeth taught Estelle to make this cake, and Estelle taught Mimi, Mimi taught Ary Jane, and Ary Jane taught Michael Lee, and Michael Lee taught Trey and Tyler. Every time I break an egg, the spirits guide me. When I stir the batter, I am stirring up these kitchen ghosts. They bolster me; but most of all, they whisper in my ear a split second before the timer buzzes (1999: 169).

West constructs a world in which, even when discussing other topics, funeral-food traditions play an underlying but pervasive role. Likewise, the connections created by heirloom recipes are atemporal. West states her forebears are around as she bakes, but then lists the connections she created through teaching the recipe to her children. Funeral food exists not only as a material feature but also as an experience linking those who engage with it across time and place, granting agency to the long-dead in the times when the dishes are produced and consumed.

West begins her chapter her chapter about funeral food (1999: 132–139) by discussing the Southern tradition of bringing food to the bereaved at their homes, explaining that churches or church ladies are often those most involved with these preparations (1999: 132). She mentions that funeral homes will even provide food books with stickers to affix to the bottom of dishes to help in their return and adds that specific foods, such as fried chicken, casseroles, and chicken and dumplings — things that 'must transport with ease, and be reheatable' (1999: 133) — are, amongst many others, universally appropriate. [20] On the other hand, spicy food and some other dishes are

> inappropriate for the bereaved. This is not the time to being Better Than Sex Cake or Death By Chocolate. And it's never a good idea to

[20] This is a practice that will be explored more in depth in the next chapter.

> use uncooked eggs in funeral food.... I myself have never seen appetizers at a funeral. And I have yet to see chicken soup. You'd think it would be just the thing to take the edge off of grief: It serves a crowd, it's a snap to reheat, and it possesses amazing power to console and cure. However, it sloshes while being transported. Unless you bring it in a huge Tupperware bowl, the poor widow, who is already distracted by grief and guests, will have to find a great big pot to reheat the soup. Unless a kind neighbour is pulling kitchen duty, the widow has two pans to wash — yours and hers (1999: 137–138).

Thus appropriateness is not simply about what is proper to consume at the funeral meal, but is also entangled with the realities of women's labor, an instance of both female expectation and work. Proper funeral food anticipates those needs so as to minimize the work of the bereaved, specifically the female bereaved, and still provide culturally appropriate, identifiable food dishes that connect the cooks and consumers with people and places from the past and future.

While West devotes a single explicit chapter and several other passages to funeral-food traditions in her childhood home in Louisiana and her adult home of Tennessee, Metcalfe and Hays make the phenomenon the central premise of their book and cover the Mississippi Delta, an area spanning sections of Mississippi and Alabama.[21] Metcalfe and Hays devote entire chapters to appropriate foods, inappropriate foods, religious influence on funeral-food customs, gifting traditions and proper responses, and alcohol, using pithy anecdotes and recipes to punctuate their text. Perhaps most important to this study, Metcalfe and Hays present a Southern funeral-food culture in which the physical objects, that is to say, the food items themselves, form a web of interaction with the living and the dead. The social mores surrounding funeral foods become both obvious and remarkable to the participants in their transgression:

[21] As such, between Metcalfe and Hays and West the area of my fieldwork location forms a main pathway.

> One thing we know from funerals past: you're going to get some food you don't want. Food snobs have reached the point that they're horrified at anything that comes out of a can or box. It has hummingbird's tongue on toast or nothing. But it's better to receive a Twinkie pie graciously than to dine haughtily on hummingbird's tongue. To their credit, even food snobs seem to drop their pretensions at funerals. They probably go into secret Jell-O withdrawal between funerals. As for the congealed salad made with Coca-Cola, you may think it should be hidden behind the epergne, but little old ladies and gentlemen appreciate soft food. They will be grateful for that Bing cherry salad with Coca-Cola. We don't to go out of this world with ribs or hot 'n' spicy barbecue, but if some kindly person shows up with them, our descendants will accept them graciously. If not, we'll haunt them (2005: 102).

Metcalfe and Hays present an environment in which how one reacts to funeral food reflects on both the living and the dead. Even foods deemed inappropriate should be accepted as if they were both wanted and expected, although Metcalfe and Hays mention that to personal confidantes, the wrongness of the choice can and will be commented on. In doing so, funeral food becomes an in-group designator. Individuals unaware of the inappropriateness of their offerings will be treated with respect and remain unaware, but amongst participants already familiar with the current culturally approved practices, the small whispers and comments about the unusual food gifts act as a regulating factor (2005: 103).

Funeral Food in Southern Music

Country music is an American folk music expression which achieved its current level of success by drawing on the rural, Southern regionalism from which it was conceived (Peterson and Di Maggio 1975). Embedded aspects of Southern tradition and culture can often be identified within the poetic and ballad-like lyrics of country music. While death itself is a reoccurring theme in country music, funerals and specifically funeral food are much less common (Kincaid 1994). For example,

two of Tom T. Hall's songs mention or are ostensibly about funerals. However, 'I Hope It Rains At My Funeral' mostly focuses on the narrator's hard life, only mentioning his hope for his funeral at the end, while the 'Ballad of Forty Dollars' simply describes a gravedigger's feelings as he watches the start of a funeral for a man who owes him money. Perhaps the most famous song in country music featuring a funeral, George Jones's 'He Stopped Loving Her Today,' mostly deals with the observations and internal landscape of the narrator, only addressing the funeral in passing (Isenhour 2011).

In fact, Kate Campbell's simply titled 'Funeral Food' seems to be the only song that directly deals with Southern funeral-food traditions:

Aunt Fidelia brought the rolls
With her green bean casserole
The widow Smith down the street
Dropped by a bowl of butter beans
Plastic cups and silverware
Lime green Tupperware everywhere
Pass the chicken, pass the pie
We sure eat good when someone dies

Funeral food
It's so good for the soul
Funeral food
Fills you up down to your toes
Funeral food
Funeral food

There sits mean ole Uncle Bob
Gnawing on a corn on the cob
And who's that walking through the door
I don't think I've ever seen him before
Isn't it a shame she passed away
She made the best chocolate cake
Let's hit the line a second time
We sure eat good when someone dies

Everybody's here for the feast
But come next week where will they be

Campbell's lyrics describes food gifts, food abundance, food as storytelling gateways ('she made the best chocolate cake'), and even includes a description of the home dishware. Most notable about Campbell's song, however, is how blithely she addresses the subject. Encapsulating the positive feelings elicited, for example, in *Elizabethtown*'s funeral-food scene, Campbell claims that 'funeral food, it's so good for the soul,' and in doing so echoes Myers's claim that the social norms and tradition allow the enculturated a reprieve from grief and an outlet for action that allows them to take known, concrete, prescribed actions to conquer death and distance themselves from it instead of just speaking ritual 'words against death' (Davies 2002).

Conclusion

While there is some debate in various arenas as to where the absolute edges of the American South can be placed, by all metrics, the northwest Georgia fieldwork site is a quintessentially Southern location. Using the specific census information from three northwest Georgia counties to generalize the area in an attempt to ensure anonymity, in which the other counties show no major deviation, northwest Georgia can be shown to be overwhelmingly white, socio-economically middle- to lower-middle class, and Christian, specifically Evangelical Protestant. These pervasive social categories lead to unexplored social expectations amongst the residents that are problematized in the following chapters.

Evidence for a Southern funeral-food tradition that is both acknowledged by its participants and is engaged with to at least some extent by the dominant culture across the American South can be seen within popular forms of cultural engagement such as movies, music, and novels.

The salient cultural features drawn from the above media illustrate a gendered engagement with food via divisions of labor. Likewise, as the American South moved away from slave labor and black servants, the role in the provision, display, and serving of funeral food of women in the extended social networks of the bereaved or the deceased can be shown to grow. Additionally, the prevalence of overtly Christian identified characters, Protestant Christian themes, the importance of ministers and their families, and their social lives of the bereaved give glimpses of the importance of religion and religiosity to sociality in the region. Both of these themes will be explored in greater depth in the coming chapters. This evidence, along with a discussion of the wider religious and other characteristics of the area in general, creates a foundational context and overview for the Southern postmortem and funeral-food traditions, while also showing consistency in the evidence that begins to coalesce into a strong, reified tradition.

Chapter 5
Eating with our Eyes: Southern Funeral Food in the Blogosphere

Introduction

The Southern funeral-food tradition is both acknowledged by its participants and is engaged with to at least some extent by the dominant culture across the American South. Evidence for it can be seen in how individuals from within the cultural landscape discuss the postmortem and funeral-food traditions of the American South on online formats. As such, this chapter displays a wider context for the Southern postmortem and funeral-food traditions before examining the specific location of my fieldwork.

Blogs, other assorted forms of online journaling, and the comments that they garner are quickly gaining traction as points of data collection in social research (Hookway 2008); when looking at blogs, 'at their core, weblogs are pages consisting of several posts or distinct chunks of information per page, usually arranged in reverse chronological order from the most recent post at the top of the page to the oldest post at the bottom' (Bausch, Haughey, and Hourihan, 2002: 7). On personal or lifestyle blogs, content is created by the author and targeted towards an audience with or looking for a shared life experiences. Ronald Chenail states that the 'often personal nature of blogs can make them fruitful opportunities for qualitative researchers to study because they can afford investigators a public conduit to back stage thoughts and feelings of others' (2011: 252). Susan Eldred (2013) shows in her work on British fashion bloggers how the blog is a constructed environment that

nonetheless authentically reflects the authors' native thoughts and feelings at the time of publication. She also shows how media anthropology via examination of blogs grants the reader a fuller picture of on-the-ground social behaviors.

In death studies, Tony Walter's work on Jade Goody's death and public displays of grief around it provides an exemplary instance of the use of blogs and other new media as departing points for social analysis. Walter (2011), using primarily online forum comments and blogs, shows how the pseudo-religious language utilized in online supporters' discussion of Goody creates a broad culturally Christian engagement with death in which mourners grant social agency to the deceased. Likewise, as I show below, blogs can provide a rich history of discussion about topics for which there are lacunae in the academic literature. Each of the following subsections centers around a forum or blog post, which are further supplemented with and compared to similar community posts from other sources.

What to Eat When Someone Dies: Funeral Food for the Worst of Times

The acknowledgment of Southern funeral-food traditions as a unique cultural phenomenon on blogs is fairly ubiquitous. Rebecca Orchant writes in a post on overall American funeral-food traditions:

> Last year, I heard Julia Reed speak at the Southern Food Writing Conference. Reed has waxed poetic about funeral food with her own endearing and hilarious bravado before, but this time she told a story that I haven't been able to forget. Her own grandparents died in a tragic accident. When her family received the call, the motions of preparing for what would come next began immediately. As her mother rushed out the door to make arrangements, she shouted back to Reed with all the importance in the universe, "*Go clean out the refrigerator*."
>
> In the American South, your refrigerator will immediately fill up with Jell-O salads, potato salads, deviled eggs, and fried chicken (2014).

In this short anecdote, already the social impact of Southern funeral-food traditions begins to emerge. Reed and her mother begin funeral arrangements the moment they receive word of their bereavement, even though the death was unexpected. As part of that initial preparation, food gifts are expected in such quantity that the refrigerator needs to be cleared. As her mother leaves to make the necessary arrangements outside of the home, Reed remains in the family manse to prepare the home and presumably receive the gifts of food she clears the way for. Finally, Orchant acknowledges that specific foods, such as the old-fashioned Jell-O salads, potato salads, deviled eggs, and fried chicken, make up a large part of the character of Southern funeral foods.

Mary Foreman, on her blog Deep South Dish, reports similar events.

> The Cajun and I attended a funeral yesterday, and the gathering of the family after made me think of southern traditions that are centered around food, this being one of them….
>
> Aside from the casseroles and other dishes that make their way to the home of those suffering, once the funeral service is over, and the procession has carried the deceased to their final resting place, all of the friends and family gather, either returning to the church hall or else to a private residence, and the party begins.
>
> Done pot luck style and ***never***[22] in a restaurant, everybody brings their favorite dishes and all of the family and friends gather, eat, chat and catch up with one another and reminisce about the departed (2010).

Foreman raises several salient points in this passage. She takes for granted that 'casseroles and other dishes' will be delivered to the home of the bereaved between the time of death and the funeral. She then identifies the post-funeral meal as a separate but related event in the funeral and mourning period. The post-funeral meal is described as a potluck, an American term referring to a meal in which each person

[22] Emphasis maintained from the original text.

in attendance contributes a dish. Additionally, the meal is considered a time for attendees to 'catch up' with one another by sharing stories both about and without the deceased.

Many of the comments on the original blog post add personal accounts that enhance the understanding of the events described. For example, one commenter, Lisa, writes

> This is SO true! My mom (in her mid 50s) is now one of the "old ladies" of the community who is always asked to contribute to funeral dinners in the town where I grew up. All of the actual "old ladies" are too old to help out now...or it's their funerals the meals are being prepared for. No matter which church hosts the funeral, the meal is always at the community building and people from various churches contribute to the meal.
>
> Interestingly, the tradition in the town where I now live (about 8 miles away) is entirely different. There is a Food Committee at THE church and all of the people on the food committee bring a specified dish: ham, sliced cheese, rolls, potato salad (they are all supposed to use the same recipe), and/or sheet cake. Then all of the potato salads are mixed up (ew) and the cakes are sliced and the meal is served family style, with platters and bowls of everything on each table. The meal is the same at every funeral.

Lisa describes the details of two traditions related to Foreman's original post. The first tradition, which Lisa identifies as the same as Foreman's initial observations, includes specific women asked to provide dishes for the post funeral meal. Lisa makes a point to say that these women come from separate (Christian) Church congregations and that the meal itself is held in a neutral location — a community center. Although it seems Lisa considers the two phenomena the same, Lisa's recounting of specific requests differs from Foreman's account of a traditional potluck.

Lisa hails the second tradition as 'entirely different' to what the original post describes, even though the two social conventions share many similarities. In both of

Lisa's descriptions, a select group of women provides most of the food for the post-funeral meal. The main discrepancies seem to be that, in the second practice, the meal is hosted by a single church congregation instead of a confederation, and the participants are required to bring specific foodstuffs instead of following their own conscience. Also of note in Lisa's description is that post–funeral-food traditions, while maintaining this general consistency of practice, may shift over relatively short amounts of physical distance and between dominant social groups.

Other commenters share their own stories displaying an internal consistency with the previously mentioned texts. A commenter identified as Angie states that

> I thought, when I moved here to Orlando, that no one ever dies, I never see processions at all. And they never have funeral services for people, GASP! and no food! They just cremate them, and go about their lives, strange to southern people I know. I like the tradition of the wake, the funeral service in the church, the service at the grave site, the after funeral feast at the host's home, and the 2 week long (or more) food feast that follows. Everyone should do it our way.

Another commenter, Carrie in Alabama, wrote, 'I just got off the phone with a lady from church that wanted to know what I would be bringing Monday for the funeral! I came straight to your page :) I am bringing the Texas sheet cake by the way,' while another, anonymous commenter stated that 'You made me laugh with tears in my eyes. Every funeral I have been to had a church meal afterwards. Served Baked Ham, Tossed Salad, Potato Salad, Hash Brown Casserole (aka Funeral Potatoes) and desserts.' Commenters display strong attachments to personal funeral-food practices while also showing an understanding that the practice may display some flexibility.

Funeral Food: Love in a Casserole Dish

Kim Holloway addresses analogous themes to those addressed by the writers above, but she attempts, for the sake of any non-Southerners who might be reading, to explain the traditions in greater depth.

> Most Southern ladies of a certain age keep at least one casserole in the deep freeze at all times. You never know when somebody will up and die, so it's best to be prepared. However, if you're momentarily casserole-less, not to worry: grieving Southerners always welcome fried chicken, even if it's store-bought. I'd like to put in a plug for one (or more) of those chicken nugget platters from Chick-fil-A (unless somebody dies on Sunday, when all the Chick-fil-As are closed). I'm still grateful to the kind soul who delivered one of those when my mom died.
>
> I should mention that funeral food isn't actually served at the funeral. You bring it to the home of the deceased, so the grieving family members and the people who drop by to pay their respects have something to eat. When Southerners lose a loved one, they rarely lose their appetite, but almost always lose the desire to cook.

Holloway's post continues, discussing what kinds of foods are appropriate and inappropriate, as well as why:

> Of course, you needn't only bring savory sustenance. Sweets are an essential part of a Southern mourner's diet. And for the love of all that's holy, do not make funeral sweets with Splenda, people! Grief and dieting go together like…like…ok, they just don't go together AT ALL.
>
> If you want to bring over some meat-flavored vegetables, that's great. But a salad probably isn't your best bet. No, not even a congealed "salad." Especially if the recently departed had been hospitalized for any length of time before their departure. Nobody wants to be reminded of institutional gelatin, even in the best of times.

This discussion is followed by a 'handy guide' to three categories of Southern Funeral Foods. 'Great Southern Funeral Food' comprises: 'Casseroles (anything made with cream of something soup is most welcome), Deep-fried meat or vegetables, Chicken 'n dumplings, BBQ, Lasagna, Potatoes (preferably mashed or au gratin), Homemade mac 'n cheese, Bread, Ham (spiral sliced preferred, but not

required), Chili or hearty soup (Not chicken noodle; no one's getting better anytime soon…), [and] Homemade sweets of any kind (remember, no Splenda!)'. 'Suitable Southern Funeral Food' includes 'Cold cuts and sandwich fixings, Egg/potato/chicken/pasta salad, Store-bought sweets (think Sara Lee, not Little Debbie), [and] Ice cream', while 'Green salad, Crudité platter, Fruit basket, Low-cal frozen entrees, Tofu of any variety, [and] Chewing gum' are strictly 'Ill-advised'.

She also discusses the timing of food-gift delivery — 'If you can't get over to the home of the deceased right away, don't despair. In fact, I'd recommend avoiding the rush and swinging by with snacks a few days later. Trust me, the bereaved will appreciate a fresh supply of comfort food' — and the role of food gifts in easing the bereaved's burden, both physical and emotional: 'When my mom died, I can't remember eating much else but cold fried chicken and some kind of cake (caramel, maybe?). But I do remember my relief at not having to think about fixing something to eat. While food isn't a panacea for grief, it does serve as a small island of pleasure in an ocean of pain.'

Holloway's post can be examined for meaning beyond the surface. Early on, Holloway establishes funeral-food traditions as gendered. The gendered nature of Southern funeral-food traditions is, however, a specific expression of Southern womanhood. The provision of funeral food is not only a task for Southern women, but especially a requirement for 'southern ladies of a certain age,' that is, the funeral-food traditions define, in part, Southern womanhood more than vice versa. These women are not only subject to a social convention dealing with the expectation of death, but they also must also be socially prepared for death's inevitability by having a casserole ready in the deep freeze. Holloway's mention of ready-made casseroles

explains how Orchant's expectation that food will begin arriving as soon as the death is announced is realized.

Through her language, Holloway also introduces the notion that homemade foodstuffs are preferred. Fried chicken is welcomed, according to Holloway '**even**[23] if it is store-bought.' This use of *even* as a qualifier shows an implicit expectation that store-bought would not normally be expected. This notion connects to the appropriateness of specific food items as funeral food, which is raised by Holloway as well. Holloway's list of appropriate items does not exist in isolation. *Beverly's Back Porch* provides another such list (2010):

> If you are driving around in the country during the week or on a Saturday and come across a little country church with lots of cars around, there is going to be funeral food there soon. Stop in and have a bite. They will make you feel welcome and feed you til you drop. This will be the menu; fried chicken, country ham, city ham, roast turkey and stuffing, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese (Velveeta), green beans, corn, Lima beans, squash casserole (cream of mushroom soup), cabbage of some kind, kale or collard greens, and of course mashed potatoes, etc., at least 5 different jello type salads, all sweet, homemade yeast rolls, cornbread. The dessert table would put any fine restaurant to shame. These are the basics, angel food cake, jam cake, chocolate cake, apple cake, blackberry cobbler, peach cobbler, apple pie, pecan pie, chocolate cream pie and more. Plus at least 5 tubs of Cool Whip. The beverages are Maxwell House coffee, sweet tea and lemonade. Don't be asking for unsweet tea or any kind of fancy coffee.

Additionally, Apavlik, a commenter on a *Southern Living* blog about funeral food, presents a very similar list, noting how 'These are all easy to prepare / buy, and all reheat well and quickly for the family (*Southern Living* 2007).

Holloway names both diet items and vegetarian-friendly foodstuffs, such as tofu or green salads, as inappropriate as Southern funeral-food choices. Similarly,

[23] Emphasis mine

Beverly's Back Porch (2013, 2010) says to avoid asking for unsweetened tea or a fancy coffee. It is notable that these are items and dietary choices of exclusion, which Mary Douglass (1966) notes make for symbolic social boundaries and, by doing so, create an in group and an out group. The post-funeral meal and other instances of funeral food denote a liminal period. As social relationships are re-examined and redefined, it is expected that specific dietary markers of separateness will be ignored. This point of social exclusion extends to both the provider of the nonstandard foodstuff and anyone consuming it. That is to say, someone who brought a tofu dish would automatically be marked as operating outside the social norms, but also anyone partaking of the dish may well be marked as a 'tofu eater.' These categories have a direct potential impact on the social restructuring that happens, as they remind attendees about the individuals' separateness from the social hierarchy.

However, this does not mean that all new foods must be excluded from the event. A novel casserole recipe may be introduced as long as it follows the 'made with cream of something soup' format that Holloway notes as standard. Likewise, Holloway shows a strong gratitude for 'those chicken nugget platters from Chick-fil-A.' While the nugget platter is presented as an innovative offering, it still follows the general formula for traditional food: at base, chicken nuggets are boneless fried chicken bites, a food Holloway has already highlighted as perfectly acceptable to both provide and purchase for funeral-food offerings. The specific mention of the Chick-fil-A company may have significance as well: the fast-food company is not only well-known for having a strong Christian mission statement (as reflected in their Sunday closing); it is also a noted for its strong regional origins and ties to the South.

Finally, Holloway notes the temporal nature of the funeral-food event. A marked preparedness for funeral-food events means that food gifts may begin arriving as soon as the community becomes aware of the bereavement, and the post-funeral meal is itself a marked moment of both food gifting and food consumption. Still, Holloway notes the protracted nature of the Southern funeral-food gifting tradition when she recommends 'avoiding the rush and swinging by with snacks a few days later.' While the post-funeral meal marks the end of the liminal period, social care by the community continues. Food gifts are provided not only when someone pays respect to the dead but also as they pay respect to the living and nurture them in whatever new social role they are taking on.

Serious Eats

One problematic aspect of doing regional studies on the internet is the lack of ability to identify writers' and commenters' geographic locations. This is exactly the problem with the *Serious Eats* blogpost titled 'Funeral Food'. A solid discussion of funeral-food items and traditions is exhibited, but because the anonymous writer does not identify themselves or their location, the bulk of the discussion cannot be used in this study. However, that does not mean the comments on this post cannot provide any insight, as specific commenters identify their regional affiliations. A close reading of these comments supports the overall presentation of this chapter. One commenter, posting under the online moniker KitchenHawk, writes

> I'm a Southern girl, raised Baptist. It is a running joke that Southern Baptists do nothing without food present, including mourn. When someone dies, we usually feed their entire family for several days, including a meal after the funeral. Virtually everyone has their "funeral specialty"—casserole, ham, spaghetti, various "salads" (anything w/3+ ingredients, served cold). My granny is prone to

> bringing tubs of KFC. We are also prone to cooking for people who are ill or on bedrest during pregnancy or recently had a baby. We can pretty much expect a 'sign-up' sheet to be passed at Bible study most weeks for these things. Funerals, being more sudden, tend to be very much 'pot-luck'... as in, you hope you are lucky enough that there is enough food & it is not all watered-down spaghetti!

While KitchenHawk seems to consider her Southern Baptist version of mourning unique, it is consistent with other normative behaviors across the region. Food is provided by the community to the family for several days of mourning as well as for a post-funeral meal. Similar foods are identified as acceptable, and once again store-bought fried chicken is specifically highlighted as both present and acceptable. The tradition is once again identified as a potluck, acknowledging the multitudinous sourcing of the foods provided.

One new idea presented here is the notion of individuals' providing funeral specialties. KitchenHawk imparts only the faintest idea as to what this could mean, giving the impression that a specialty may consist of one or more of the standard funeral foods that she lists. While she does not give a solid explanation of this specific tradition, Terri Evans does, writing that one aunt or another would tell her to 'Go over there and get yourself a piece a that pie your Aunt Millie always makes. We wish she'd make it at Christmas 'stead of waitin' for somebody to die.' She continues, saying

> When the crowds come to show their respect, they descend upon the grieving household, their favorite recipe prepared—in a dish of course, that need not be returned. A designated friend whose grief, while real, is not as great as that of the primary bereaved would meet the donators at the door. She, (even now this is clearly a role for the women folk), accepts the comfort food, voices the appropriate clucking sounds of approval, makes note of who brought what, lest there be some confusion at the time of thank-you notes, then heads off to find a place of honor for the contribution…. Kirsten will bake "Mom's Pound cake," which is a recipe she fortunately married into and has done great justice to time and again… I think I'd like it best if

> someone also cooked up some memories all the way back to my Aunt Melba's butterscotch pie, or some of Granddaddy H'Earl's chess pie. If Granddaddy H'Earl were here today, I would still be unable to get the recipe for his chess pie. He always said, "it was 'jes pie."

Evans discusses the linking of specific foods to specific individuals, showing that funeral-food events are times for individuals to make their favorite recipes. However, due to the application of a specific cognomen, recipes can represent and link to individuals, perhaps even dead individuals, who are not present at the funeral-food event. Kirsten may make Mom's Pound cake, but as is pointed out, this is not Kirsten's mother nor is it even Kristen's Pound cake, even though she baked and brought it. Kirsten's baking of and engaging with the recipe links the current mourning event to Mom and allows for an explanation and exploration of who Mom is.

Funeral Etiquette

Lynda Winfree, a novelist from southwest Georgia, also has a blog post that deals with Southern funeral etiquette, including Southern funeral-food traditions. In her list of etiquette points, two deal explicitly with food; another one deals with it implicitly.

> 1) The family will 'receive' at one central location. For example, when my grandmother died, the family gathered at my mother's house and received visitors from a few hours after her death until after the funeral. Except for the funeral itself, someone remains at the house to receive, as visitors will drop in throughout the days before the funeral, without notice.
>
> 2) A wave of visitors will descend on the home, bearing food. The food-bearers are usually friends and extended family members. (Immediate and close family do not provide food.) All visitors are offered food from the array.
>
> . . . . . .

> 9) If the deceased was a member of a church, often the ladies of the church will provide a meal for the family following the funeral. (This is ready for them when they return home.)

The traditions Winfree presents generally accord with the examples already presented in this chapter: Food gifts are provided in the home of the bereaved by members of the extended community in the course of visiting the family; a post-funeral meal is also presented; and if the bereaved are members of a church congregation, the women of that congregation can be expected to take a major part in the production and presentation of that meal.

However, while this is generally consistent with all other instances, it is important to remember that the presentation may not be seen as familiar by those from a close but separate community. For example, Winfree states that the food provided by the women of the church being 'ready for [the bereaved] when they return home' is standard. However, this is even more of a variation than the practice that Lisa, the commenter on the Foreman blog, referred to as 'entirely different.' This treatment of minor variance as a completely different action/tradition can also be seen in the comments in Winfree's post. A blogger identified as MaryF writes that

> I don't know if it comes from being in a city in Texas or from being Catholic, but not a lot are the same. We only had visitors at the funeral home, and we had the dinner at home after the services. Not a lot of people brought food, though I've taken food to others, and my best friend brought the meal for the family/visitors. My grandmother was a member of the church, but those ladies didn't prepare anything (touch of bitterness here).

MaryF describes an experience where food gifts are still provided by those outside of the immediate family, and she also mentions a post-funeral meal. MaryF mentions herself participating in providing food gifts to the bereaved. However, the lack of involvement from the female members of her grandmother's church meant that in

MaryF's experience, the two described traditions were different — not a variance or a difference of details, but fundamentally not the same traditions.

Funeral Customs are Unique in the South

Writing for an online column in a Southern newspaper, Sharon Myers expresses many of the same ideas presented above, but she presents these Southern funeral-food traditions as actions displaying respect.

> I guess it was drilled into me at an early age that respect is the one thing that doesn't cost anything but has an infinite value. It is a sad realization that some people can't even consider the feelings of others more than their own, even for a few hours. But for every inconsiderate jerk, there are about 20 good, caring, loving people who make up for it. These are the people who are sincerely sympathetic and understand the pain and grief the family is going through. They are the ones who show up two weeks later with dinner or call and see if there is anything they can do for you months afterward.
>
> There are many outstanding characteristics about being a Southerner, but for some reason a funeral brings out the best in us. It showcases our commitment to our family, no matter how long it's been since we've seen each other, and it demonstrates our loyalty to our friends when there is a need for sympathy and kindness. Although it is tough to experience the loss of a loved one, it is the support of family and friends left behind that makes it just a little easier to bear.

Likewise, the focus is on conveying respect to the living by considering their feelings and acting accordingly. However, Myers herself lists these as uniquely Southern traditions. Thus, Myers advocates not simply empathy but also actions within a culturally preapproved social matrix.

Anatomy of a Southern Funeral

As discussed in the section on Southern movies, funeral-food events provide an opportunity for members of the community to gather and share stories. In this way, food becomes not only an object, but also an activity and a location. Like

Foreman, Katie Coakley links the act of consuming funeral food with the exchange of stories; she discusses this connection explicitly when writing about her grandfather's death.

> But it's not just the stories at the events. It's the stories before and after the visitation and the funeral, when we're all gathered together, talking and laughing and eating barbeque. They're told in the falling dark on the screened porch, the bar stools and dining room chairs pulled into the circle so that everyone can soak in the slightly faded memories that are passed from generation to generation through laughter that makes my stomach ache and tears run down my cheeks. They're told more somberly in the church Fellowship Hall over fried chicken and ham, butter beans and green beans and wild rice casserole and lemon pie, red velvet cake and brownies.

Coakley begins her work discussing standard appropriate funeral foods, considerations such as number of participants that need to be taken into account when planning dishes, and the tendency for funeral foods to proliferate, overrunning available surfaces and exceeding even grief-sharpened appetites.

> Food personifies a Southern funeral. There are inevitably two different kinds of meat, at least two types of salads, plenty of side dishes and at least three different desserts. Threatening to spill over the edges of whatever surface you're attempting to corral it on, mourning food just begs to be nibbled, sampled and snacked upon.
>
> Even if you try to plan a reasonable amount, there are always other things that seem to just appear.
>
> Case in point: my mother agreed to bring barbecue for lunch prior the viewing. We brought enough for 25 people, which was how many people we expected for lunch.
>
> My aunt brought a ham.
>
> Because eight pounds of barbecue wasn't enough—we might need a ham. We have growing boys (20 and 23 years old) and grown boys (I'm not revealing the ages of my uncles, but they're well established). We might need a ham.
>
> And a chocolate cake and a pound cake and some sort of bunt cake that I didn't get a chance to cut into.
>
> Not to mention salads, chips, pickles, beer, more beer and other assorted accoutrements.
>
> Because when you're grieving, you need to feed the grief. Grief likes food that can be reheated, spread around and savored later.
>
> Beer just requires ice. Or a freezer, if you're in a hurry.

Coakley specifically focuses on the abundance of food presented. In Myers's, Holloway's, and Orchant's blogs, the impression of a deluge of food is given, but Coakley dwells on the matter. Southern funerals are marked not only by traditional food gifts but also by an abundance of food. In the blog *Beverly's Back Porch*, this idea of abundance surrounding death is also addressed: 'There is no such thing as running out of food. The Chef at the finest restaurant in the country serving 1,000 people could not do a better job than this group of ladies' (2010). The abundance of food is not only a feature of Southern funerals; it's a feature so firmly entrenched in the culture that it forms a key part of Southern funeral-food narratives and images, forming a key part of the Southern funeral-food tradition as self-described and highlighting how the South treasures not only hospitality but also treasures its reputation for hospitality.

Coakley's discussion of funeral food mores also becomes a demonstration of how food can become attached to the story of the funeral itself:

> When my grandmother died, someone brought pimento and cheese, a staple southern spread that can be used on crackers or on a sandwich. For me, it's a beach food—we always had it at the beach because it was easy to make a lot and people could eat at will with little preparation.
>
> The pimento and cheese brought to my grandparents' house after Ninny died was homemade and not like my mother usually made, but for some reason, I thought it was the best thing in the world. It was about the only thing I wanted to eat at the time and now, when I think of that day, I think of that pimento and cheese.
>
> Now, when I think about Papa's funeral, the memory is flavored with barbecue and beer….

Barbecue and beer are not only attached to the story of her grandfather's funeral, they permeate and partially define it. Pimento cheese, on the other hand, defines her grandmother's funeral and permeates the memory so fully that the memory becomes a locus for other, associated memories of her mother's particular pimento cheese and

visiting the beach with family. In this way, Southern funeral-food traditions exceed their function as features of the funeral period and become cornerstones in which Southern culture itself is encoded.

Coakley also shows that the sharing of stories expands the mourners' understanding of the deceased beyond their particular relationship with the deceased to include as many aspects of the deceased's life as can be encoded in relationships and narrative. Moreover, the sharing is not limited to the newly deceased. As a liminal time, funeral-food events allow for the exploration and connection with the long dead.

> During the visitation, which was supposed to last two hours, I heard approximately three hours' worth of stories, about my grandfather's coaching years, his superintendent years, his golfing and fishing and hunting years. I met former football players and childhood friends, people that I had heard about for years but hadn't met. Some memories were short, and some were longer; there were stories not only about my grandfather, but also about my grandmother, more often than not causing my already filling eyes to threaten to spill. My grandmother died in 1999, but she is still remembered by the community and my grandfather's friends like it was yesterday. When folks said, 'I loved your grandmother, too,' I know that they actually knew her. And meant it.
>
> My grandfather's service was wonderful, exactly as I'd hoped it would be. There were bible verses read, hymns sung and a few special songs played: the Bainbridge High School Alma Mater, the Troy State Fight Song and a trumpet rendition of 'Take Me Out to the Ballgame' which brought me and the rest of the church to sobbing tears, much to my surprise. And there were stories, some that I had heard and many that I hadn't, but to look around the sanctuary, you'd think we'd all been replaced by bobble-head dolls, the amount that we nodded and smiled.

This period of story-telling cements a particular understanding of the deceased, beyond that previously held by any particular individual, in a way redefining the deceased's self in death. In this way, the funeral period becomes a true social rite of passage for the deceased, whose identity is analyzed in this period only to coalesce

into a new figuration. Unlike most rites of passage, however, during the funeral food and stories, the community itself is the most changed. As Coakley shows, the community itself draws together in agreement about the deceased's identity and defining personal characteristics as well as in shared emotion.

Conclusion

Food events around Southern funerals take on two forms: the postmortem food ritual, in which food is brought to the home of the bereaved in the interim period between the death and the interment, and the funeral-food ritual of the post-funeral meal. However, as explained in my previous chapter discussing the term *funeral*, due to the fluidity of the term in the Southern context, both of these events may be conflated or separately referred to as *funeral food*. While individuals participating in the event may see minor variance as a major change, the above evidence shows a consistency of practice across the region, such as:

- Food gifting is a gendered process.
- Funeral food begins arriving as soon as the wider social networks are aware of the bereavement.
- Meals are shared potluck style, with each participant bringing dishes traditional to the region that they have a self or community defined expertise in.
- The postmortem and funeral-food period is perceived as an important time in the community, where food gifts and shared meals facilitate storytelling and conversations that memorialize the deceased and reconfigure perceptions of the dead, living, and community as a whole.

- Communities maintain standards around the appropriateness of food items, which is policed, not by the recipients of these funeral-food gifts, but instead by other guests attending postmortem and funeral food-events.

This final point will be explored in greater depth in chapters 6 and 7.

Likewise, Southern funeral food is expected behavior (the above example of clearing out the refrigerator) that does not need the instruction or the assistance from professional death workers, and is a way of displaying and reaffirming regional and religious cultural identity markers. While the base function of Southern funeral food and postmortem traditions may be to provide food to physically sustain the bereaved during extended periods of mourning, the practices, due to their embedded nature, surpass this basal function of physical sustenance to also sustain and imbed regional communitas and a cultural mode of thinking. In my next chapters, I will explore these same ideas in my ethnographic data. This will allow me to compare the constructed ideas of funeral food, as presented in blogs and in the prior chapter's cultural media, with individuals' lived experiences to determine the gaps and consistency in both accounts.

Chapter 6
What's in a Casserole?: Material Culture of Southern Funeral Food

Introduction

In my previous chapter, I used popular culture media to show evidence of the pervasiveness of Southern postmortem and funeral-food traditions. In my next three chapters, I will use ethnographic observations and interviews from my fieldwork location to explore many of the ideas presented there in greater depth. In this chapter, I will examine the material culture of these traditions. Later chapters will depict the religious identity and family and gender connections inherent in the Southern funeral and postmortem food practices.

Food

Material culture refers to the centrality of objects, the properties of those objects, the materials from which those objects are constructed, and the vernacular understanding of the objects as a primary method of understanding and evaluating cultural relations (Woodward 2013). Connectedly, food, as an object of material culture, has been shown as an important link in accessing and recalling both personal and cultural memory (Sutton 2001). While in a post-industrial society, the methods and means of production of a material culture object may have shifted, the interplay between production and consumption of food may still highlight underlying assumptions and values of a community (De Solier 2013). Food, and its irreducibly

physical nature, as an omnipresent material object in the lives of the respondents, shifts and becomes significant in moments of cultural stress.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, funeral-food dishes in the South have a long continuity of tradition, and there is a clear distinction between foods considered appropriate and those considered inappropriate for preparation and consumption at Southern funeral-food events. Frank, my oldest interview participant, described funeral-food meals he remembered from the 1930s and 40s. He speaks specifically in this narrative about his grandfather's funeral:

> You'd never seen like'd the food in all your life. Everybody in our town brought food. *Everybody* in our town brought food. I never seen so much food on two tables in my life as I seen on that. We went down there, we et when we come back from the cemetery. And the next day Aunt Lucille called and told us to come down there to eat again cause they just didn't have room for all that down there. And by the time we et Aunt Lucille had us a box of food to take home, but you couldn't even tell any food had been missed, and the family was able to eat like that for a while. Oh they brought chicken, uh soup, macaroni and cheese, roast, I mean there was everything. Homemade biscuits, homemade cornbread, corn, tomatoes, butter beans, pinto beans, green beans, uh I'd never seen like the chicken in all my life and the beans were there you know, and had two or three big beef roasts and it was just amazing to see how much food there was on that table. – Frank

The next two subjects show that the only notable change from this description in the 1930s/1940s to today is perhaps the addition of further casseroles alongside the macaroni and cheese casserole. Becky reports that

> Funeral food is a lot like reunion food, so you have the things you would have at a reunion like fried chicken and potato salad. But funeral food we were always told that it was about making the family comfortable, and making sure they have what they need so they don't have to worry about normal things. Ah, um, so you wanted to take casseroles. Casseroles was a huge funeral food thing for us. Umm, anything that they could throw into a freezer and forget about because they would end up with forty different casseroles sitting on the family's table during the wake. Umm, we didn't have Wa lot of desserts for it. It was mainly staple foods. Things that they could just use to get through.

And Cynthia adds that

> The most recent funerals I went to, both of my aunts on either sides of my family died within two weeks of each other. And the food was very similar, and it was all very typical Southern food. You know, deviled eggs and uh ham sauces and banana pudding with the bananas in the pudding and then meringue on top of it and vanilla wafers which isn't exactly the way my mother use to make it. This is my aunt, her sister's, funeral.

While Becky presented 'forty different casseroles' as at least partial hyperbole, this example begins to show the basic structure of funeral foods presented throughout my fieldwork. A focus on easy-to-preserve, hearty, traditional savory dishes is supplemented by fewer, but still extant, dessert offerings. While Cynthia lists different food items as examples, the emphasis on traditional Southern fare remains.

While Richard's account below differs on the number of desserts from Becky's account – the number and appropriateness of sweets are one of the greatest variables in the study – the focus on 'Southern staples' remains constant:

> There is usually a lot of it [funeral food]…. After my dad died I remember food being around for probably weeks after he died. Typically it was something that was, you know, fried chicken, casseroles, ummm, you know, a lot, there was a lot of sweets there from what I remember, but a lot of vegetables. Typically stuff I would consider Southern staples. Chicken, butter beans, peas, umm potato casseroles, umm mac and cheese, um mashed potatoes. Occasionally we'd get something like a beef stew that somebody would have done in the crock pot, but that was mainly it.
> – Richard

Other informants are even more explicit about this connection:

> The food I'd encounter would always be things that would be simple really for people to carry and that would feed a lot of people like fried chicken, baked ham, casseroles of um broccoli or squash casserole. Umm, even people would bring loaves of bread and um sandwich meats and chips and drinks ummm, pie and desserts. But everything had to be enough for the family and people who come visit the family to feed off of for several day at least. There was never lack of food anywhere I have ever been… Salads but usually salads aren't brought because you want something simple. Maybe a potato salad or slaw but never a tossed salad…. I guess food in the South has always been how

> people come together in a difficult time…. It's always comfort food: mac and cheese, chicken and dumplings…sliced onions or tomatoes. Heaven forbid we not find some nice tomatoes because it was summer, but we'd buy them in the winter, and slice them and take them with a little salt and pepper. We'll still do that for Sunday dinner if it calls for it. Whatever momma was carrying would always call for it because she wasn't going to fix a pot of spaghetti and take that. What we take is regular Sunday dinner food, typical stuff, but nice. – Bev

The idea of normal but nice emerges as an important concept here. In this case, Bev goes on to explain that while the food itself would be considered normal for any family to partake in during an important event or Sunday dinner, the fact that all of the foods were presented together, alongside their quality, made them extraordinary.

Quantity becomes important in the concept of normal but nice. While either fried chicken or a beef roast may be considered typical food for a Sunday meal, these two dishes would be considered atypical together in that context. Therefore, their presentation alongside each other at a funeral, and even on the same plate of a person consuming food at the event, elevate the situation. Both dishes would be considered both too hearty and too costly to accompany each other at a typical meal. These two dishes being served alongside other dishes that are locally considered costly, such as other main dishes; time-consuming, such as chicken and dumplings; or difficult, such as several of the homemade desserts elevate the esteem of the food event. Furthermore, while some foods may be appropriate for a Sunday family meal, as the example of spaghetti mentioned, only the best and highest quality foods would be appropriate as a funerary offering – foods that the cook would feel not only comfortable serving to their own family but also to important guests. This opinion is corroborated by other informants as well. Rose says that

> It's [funeral food] all stuff that might be normal, but you put more effort into it. It's normal but it's special.

And Lee reports that

> It's just your typical, what we would consider comfort food. Umm, chicken, ham, macaroni and cheese, green beans, and there was congealed salads there too and always lots of desserts – tons of coffee…everyone would just bring what they wanted to – what they were best at.

In many of the above examples, informants such as Frank, Becky, Richard, and Bev mention the idea of food being an aspect of 'getting the family through' or food being expected to last for at least several days and perhaps an extended period of time.

> When my great-grandmother died we all went to the funeral home to arrange everything, and after people brought stuff and we all made something. We had coconut cake, and chocolate cake, and all the stuff from Thanksgiving because that was her favorite time of year, and pigs in a blanket…. And after the funeral when we got back to the house we had turkey and ham, stuff where we could all sit down, and talk, and be a family. And my great-grandfather on my dad's side had coconut cake, and fried chicken, and dressing. They typical Southern thing. Every time someone in the South dies it's like turkey and ham or like fried chicken and mashed potatoes and fried okra. The whole nine yards. The food means no one has to worry and everyone can just be. – Dakota

This idea of family being allowed to grieve unimpeded due to the presence of funeral food will be returned to during the last empirical chapter. However, at present, it is important to note both that this need is expected, important to the community's narrative of the mourning process, and anticipated to last longer than the time between death and interment. Thus, the concepts of comfort and 'get you through' exist as part of a process that reflects onto the material items provided. While there may be different emphases depending on the family or individual providing the food gift, all specific objects are based on concepts of communal support and physically exemplify different ways of providing that.

Depending on the individual providing the food items, emphasis is placed on long-term viability in the Southern climate or ease of preservation. Thus all of the traditional, approved items listed above are considered things that the bereaved family can freeze easily and reheated later with little effort, such as casseroles, things that take little room to store in a typical refrigerator, such as slaw, or things that the community considers safe to leave outside cold storage, such as fried chicken or bread. In all instances, they are food items that do not quickly show the signs of food waste. It is interesting to note that a tossed green salad, something mentioned in this and the previous chapter as an inappropriate Southern food item, will show signs of wilt fairly quickly in Southern heat and humidity by becoming flaccid, whereas other foodstuffs, even with ingredients that may be considered volatile, such as the mayonnaise-based slaws and potato salads prevalent in the region, are considered more preserved.

Material concerns play a part in other items considered inappropriate in other ways as well. Both Bev and Ellen mention that while roast turkey or beef may be found at a Southern funeral, roast pork would be inappropriate. However, both women explained that pork would be inappropriate not for any symbolic reason, but because pork roast would become dry if left to sit out all day for the family or those visiting, and because it does not reheat well. The materiality of the actual food itself dictates its appropriateness in most cases. Wilted salad or dry pork creates inconsistent material experiences for those attending. Likewise, food with ingredients with which the funeral-food participants are unfamiliar are excluded most often on the grounds that they are too different from the tasters' normal palate and those involved with the dish do not know or trust its preservability.

Preparation

While the symbolic importance of the production of specific funeral foods will be discussed in my final empirical chapter, the physical production of funeral food can be broken down into two axes of two categories each: homemade as opposed to bought and programmed as opposed to extemporaneous.

Homemade versus Bought

The main distinction informants discussed and I observed during my fieldwork was the separation between homemade, that is to say, items constructed or cooked, in whole or in part, by the presenter, and bought, or purchased, funeral-food items.

> Most wakes and after funerals and things like that I've been to have been potlucks. So people bring different things. Sometimes it's store bought, most of the time it's cooked by hand. – Viola

The default assumption, however, is that a funeral-food gift is homemade:

> I mean, you assume everything is homemade even though you know that it all isn't. You can usually tell what was bought. It's easy with like the chicken or the cakes. Sometimes potato salads and coleslaw look and taste more like the supermarket than someone's kitchen. – Norma

So, while there is an expectation of homemade production, there is also an acknowledgment that at least some of the food provided by guests for the bereaved family will be purchased. This seems to cause some tension within the community. While some items are deemed perfectly acceptable as store-bought fare, others are viewed with suspicion:

> My momma would always want to make a meat, a bean, and a side to take. But then she'd buy rolls, and even people would think to buy paper plates, silverware I mean plastic forks and knives, cups, and ice cause they don't want the family to have to think about anything….

> People would even buy food that they could go buy at a restaurant like lasagna and bread. We've even gone far enough to buy toilet paper, paper towels and plastic baggies…. People like to bring fried chicken but fried chicken is so prevalent in the South that they usually go buy it. Even our grocery stores have it fresh. That way you know the chicken's going to be done (laughs). It gives people that work something nice to bring, and I'm not much of a cook. – Bev

James gives a counter example, in which store-bought food is culturally awkward:

> When my grandmother died, someone brought by several big cans of Dinty Moore [a name brand] beef stew. It was nice, I mean I know Granddeddy was able to eat on it several weeks later when all of the other food was gone. I mean, they didn't have to bring anything so it was nice that they brought it. We just didn't know what we should do with it when it came in. Should we open it? It didn't really feel right to start cooking with so many people in the house so we put out the loaf bread she brought with it, and just put the can under the cabinet. They just didn't seem to go with everything else, y'know?

Frances says that

> There was a lot of food a Granny's house after she died. Family and friends had brought even junk and snack food to help us after she died.

While some bought items seem to be outside of the expected and confusing for participants, even if they might have been more readily accepted if they were provided in a homemade format, purchased items that are also convenience items, such as paper plates, plastic cutlery, disposable cups, and bags of ice seem to be universally considered part of the food gifting tradition, even though these items are demonstrably not food. Some food items, such as fried chicken, seem appropriate for purchase because of their ubiquity and uniformity of presentation.

Even as an individual who sees no shame in providing bought foodstuff, Denise still provides the bereaved family alternatives to serving store-bought food out of its purchase containers.

> I take chicken and sandwich stuff and potato salad because I work and have to take food after I get off. The family can eat the sandwich stuff after everyone is gone cause it's really simple, and no one can tell the difference with chicken anyway. It's lucky now there are stores where you can buy stuff like that now because people work so much now. I called and special-ordered it though to make sure the grocery store would have enough chicken, and I got the potato salad because it's really good there. They make it; they don't buy it in. Even when we are buying something we'll take bowls and plates and stuff [serving dishes from her own house] so there aren't just containers sittings around [and looks nice]. – Denise

Food is never supplanted as a primary gift; that is to say, food would be expected in some way, but items that facilitate the serving and consumption of food are equally provided and appreciated. All items that help the bereaved family maintain the ability to host individuals in their home, from toilet paper to bin liners, were listed as appropriate bought items to provide alongside funeral-food items.

Likewise, James' stew from the example above fits the preservation criteria mentioned in the previous section, but was still unwelcome even though James was obviously trying to appreciate the gift. This is perhaps one of the best examples of food not just being there to feed the bereaved family, but also to facilitate their position as host. The obvious labor and packaging inherent in this specific food gift created a shift in the dynamic in the event for James and his family. Instead of benefiting from the food gifts and the associated host status, the material components of the packaging and the state as uncooked necessitate intervention, making the gift more of a chore.

Social distance also seems to play a part in how welcome appropriate bought items were. Denise describes, above, taking food to the funeral of the mother of a long-time acquaintance. Likewise,

> I teach school, and it was my para-pro's sister that died, so all of us who work together daily and the group of us got together and said

> ‘what should we do?’ So we decided we would go and get cold cuts, and sandwich stuff and we like took up money and we bought all that and a couple of packs of trays and took them over there. – Bridget

Bridget goes on to explain that, because she did not know her colleague’s family, she had no idea what food would already be present or what food would be appreciated. The store-bought deli platter was seen as a way to let the para-pro know that her colleagues cared about her and supported her in her bereavement, but would not compete with or be redundant thanks to a more traditional food gift from a closer relation. The deli platter was also something that Bridget, and other informants who also mentioned the item, appreciated for its utility. It was seen as a food gift that could feed those that were too grief-stricken for a fuller meal, tired of or overwhelmed by the more traditional food gifts, in a rush to funeral arrangements, or children. While a sandwich could be constructed and consumed hastily, traditional food gifts were seen as a greater investment of time to consume or too awkward to consume when traveling about planning the funeral.

Programmed versus Extemporaneous

While the informants all showed an awareness of the tension between homemade and store-bought food items, the difference between programmed and extemporaneous food gifts was not reflected upon. For the purpose of this project, programmed food gifts are funeral foods that were coordinated or assigned by a group of individuals in any way. Extemporaneous funeral foods are therefore food gifts that are wholly decided upon by the person preparing and offering the gift without outside influence. Those who are used to a programmed funeral-food experience can and do still allow for extemporaneous food gifts and can show an

awareness of the gifting process. However, those with experience of totally extemporaneous funeral-food gifting scenarios do not consider the possibility of a programmed situation:

> Our church has always been real organized about our funeral food – I mean if that's what you want to call it. I mean, we've had a set system as long as I can remember. So that was never, I mean, I think I can honestly say that I never took food to anyone who died at church when it wasn't my turn so to speak. When I wasn't called and asked. I mean, I'd take food myself if someone dies at school [where she worked], or I knew from around town, or knew some other way, or you know, family. But never for church. That's just the way we do it. – Lee

However, although it was the most often cited example of the practice, programmed funeral-food gifts do not happen only within the formal structure of a church's women's group as Lee discusses; funeral-food programming can also take place within secular social groups or even friendship networks:

> Towards the end of high school, my friend Sarah lost her grandmother. It was the first time anyone in our group of friends had really lost someone close to them so we wanted to do something to support her. I talked to Laura, and Mary, and Lacy, and we decided what to make and each took something over because we wanted to make sure we made a good showing of Sarah's friends. I made biscuits and a casserole. – Rose

Programmed funeral food seems to have three main points: lessening the financial investment of funeral-food gift givers, anticipating the needs givers of funeral food who work, and making sure the workload does not rest disproportionately on a limited number of individuals. Ellen reports that at her church, the financial investment was taken into consideration:

> The head of the committee will call around after there has been a death in the congregation, and she'll make sure we can still bring something. She has a list of what we brought, you know, last time, and she tries to spread it out so the same person doesn't have to buy like a ham every time for example.

And Lee says that in her church, the funeral-food organizers respected people's time constraints:

> They were always real good when people were working to get those people to bring like the drinks and the rolls and you know or pick something up like the chicken or whatever. I know when I was working 49% they would call and ask me 'Now, when are you working this week Lee' before they would stop and ask me what they wanted me to bring.'

Additionally, Norma speaks of working with her church to balance both the labor and the food offerings:

> Well, sometimes what you bring can really depend on the group of other people you know around you. When I was going to church with my mother we would call around and make sure everyone was bringing something different because otherwise everyone would show up with fried chicken and the same group of little old ladies would end up having to make the bulk of the food. – Norma

Due to the reliance on social networking to create a programmed funeral-food event, programmed funeral food preparation is by nature more social than extemporaneous funeral food preparation is. Likewise, extemporaneous funeral food only exists as a category when compared to programmed funeral food, and it can be seen most specifically by the category's lack of planning instead of by the advancement of any one specific idea.

Extemporaneous funeral-food gifts are most often discussed in terms of the personal decision-making process that led to the specific gift. Some families have special recipes they rely on for funeral food:

> My family has a special Funeral Cake, so I always try to make that if someone dies. However, anything else I take is really just dependent on how much I'm working. If I'm really busy with casework then I might just pick up some chicken and drinks to go with it, but if I have the time I might make something like a casserole or chicken 'n dumplings. Maybe meatloaf. – Jewel

Some families incorporate planning for funeral food preparation into pantry organization and family meal preparation:

> My mom would always keep staples like cans of soup in the cabinet that she wouldn't touch. That way show would always be able to make a casserole of some type if anyone we know died. The other stuff she would make would just be what we had around the house. Sometimes even what we were planning for dinner. Now that I'm married I try to at least keep a box of cake mix or something. – Catherine

In all cases, questions of familial tradition, time available, and supplies at hand help to shape extemporaneous food gifts choices.

Transportation

Whether bought or homemade, funeral-food gifts must get to the recipients. Thus, a major concern for those involved in the Southern funeral-food gift tradition is the ease of transporting food items they have procured or created. Bought items forgo this problem as they are already pre-packaged for transport, but this pre-packaging raises the connected concern of serving and display that Denise raises above.

Primarily, food has to be considered easy to transport with minimum mess and also has to be expected to pass between several hands:

> You don't have to um, you don't have to feel like you have to carry on a conversation. You definitely don't need to feel like you *should* go in and have a chit-chat. Now if they ask you to sit – even if they ask you to sit down there is usually so much going on and so many people around. But ah, normally I would say, now when you are taking food to the home like that you don't always see the person that you are closest to who's loved one has died. Usually it's another family member that answers the door. A lot of times it's just a neighbor. If it's the husband that died I'd never ask to see the widow. I'd just say my name and let them know that I wanted to drop this food by. You're not there for a visit on your terms. You just need to make sure what you have is ready to be passed over then, and that you

> have it in a way that it's easy for the person at the door to take it. Now if they ask you in that's great. – Lee

Becky tells us that transportability is one of the chief virtues of the funeral-food staple lasagna:

> When I start getting ready to make the food that I'm going to bring first of all I try to remember if they have any allergies because I have so many friends that do (laughs). But then I think about what their kitchen is like, if it's just going to be a small viewing, what their living situation is like. Am I going to need to bring extra spoons to serve it, do I need to make sure that it can just sit on the counter and not get pulled off by little kids, those sorts of thing. Pasta dishes are easy. Lasagna. There was always lasagna. I never understood why, but it's just really easy to throw together, easy to cut a slice out of and eat late at night when you wake up and your person is not there anymore, and um easy to carry. – Becky

As Lee and Becky both display above, a self-effacing quality is expected in the delivery of Southern funeral-food items. Both of these women speak in terms of making the delivery and the visit easy on the bereaved, while simultaneously not questioning the need for a visit. There is no cultural assumption that it would be easier on the family not to receive visitors bearing gifts. Food gifters are likewise expected to take the physical and material constraints of the location the food will be received into account when preparing and transporting food gifts. It is not just the food that is expected to be taken to the location of the bereaved but any assorted items needed for the final preparation and distribution of the specific food gift, such as extra serving spoons. The inclusion of the serving spoons adds complexity to the food gifting criteria, however. While the ability to freeze and keep foods for the future is one of the main criteria for choosing appropriate food as discussed above, the inclusion of serving utensils implies that there is at least something of an

expectation that the food will be consumed imminently by the bereaved family and their guests.

The construction and transportation of funeral-food gifts seem to have their own material culture outside of the food itself. As was shown in my chapter on mediated representations of Southern funeral and postmortem food, the display of mixed cutlery and dishware is a strong visual representation of the communal nature of the food traditions surrounding death in the American South. During my fieldwork, I observed and had many women tell me that women in the community were likely to keep specific, often nicer bowls or casserole dishes specifically to take to funerals:

> [my mother] had this Tupperware container that was tall and clear and it had black handles that you, a white you a clear lid, I say white frosted might be a better word, with black handles that you would cross over and it would snap. And she'd put paper towels down first, and then she'd put the chicken after it cooled in there, and then paper towels on top so if it was still a little warm the steam would get on the paper towels and the crust wouldn't fall off the chicken. If she cooked a ham she would um had this old ugly green baking pan that had warped and was old as the hills. But she would cook it with that and she would put at least one or two layers of aluminum foil under it and when it was done she would put two – you know wrap it in aluminum foil again – and then she would probably carry it in that dish and when she got to where she was going we would usually put the ham or the um roast on a paper plate and you'd just pick up the whole aluminum foil and everything and set it on the paper plate. A lot of times she might go ahead and cut up the ham um 'cause it would stay moist but she didn't want to cut up the roast because beef roast is known to dryin' out real quick. For potato salad she had this brown bowl that I still use that she would cover with foil. A lot of times she carried things like that if it was real close family or friends that she knew we would see again, but if it was more distant, like cousins, we'd buy throw-away roasting pans, aluminum roasting pans, and put her meats in those. And she had been known to buy little cheap Rubbermaid Tupperware, well not real Tupperware, bowls for her sides, that she'd just leave. She'd say she wouldn't want it back. Old plastic butter tubs. – Bev

Bev speaks of the observations she made while she was a young woman helping her mother prepare funeral-food gifts and learning how to participate in the local funeral-food tradition. While this aspect of education will be addressed in later chapters, some key observations about transport can be drawn from this passage. Funeral-food containers, the physical items, can become heirloom objects that are passed down and their use continued after the original owner's death. This may be one reason that some daughters begin taking foods that their mothers had been known for preparing for funerals after the mother dies herself.[24] Bev's conceptualization of her mother's brown bowl as a funeral potato salad container means that when she goes to use the dish for a funeral, it is potato salad that she makes to fill it. Secondly, choices in transportation are not made just for ease of receipt by the bereaved, but also to ensure quality. One of the tests of quality for fried chicken is a well-adhered, crispy crust; this is what is being preserved with the paper towels. Bev's mother, then, safeguards not only the recipients' experience of the chicken but also her reputation as a good cook. Thirdly, if any further work is needed, from reheating the food to carving a ham in the example above, the provider is expected to do it herself or to provide an explanation for why she has not, as with the beef roast. Finally, the acknowledgment of what dishes must be returned and which do not is an aspect of the funeral food process that is at the forefront of the minds of all participants in the process. It is so important to the Southern funeral-food experience that a codified process has emerged.

[24] This concept of heirloom dishes in reference to foodstuffs will be explored in greater depth in chapter 8.

Books

The only aspect of the Southern funeral and postmortem food tradition that the traditional funeral industry has any connection to is in regard to the social niceties surrounding the acknowledgment of food gifts and the return of physical dishes. The funeral home that is in charge of the preparation of the body provides an ornamental wreath of silk flowers for the door or mailbox of the bereaved home to aid guests in finding the location, and many even provide extra seating if needed in the form of folding chairs. Both of these seemed to be complimentary services provided by the funeral home, with no need of request by the family, in an effort to support their clients. If the body is removed from the deceased's home by the funeral home's employees, the wreath and extra chairs may be brought at the same time. They will be picked up by the funeral home employees on the afternoon of or the day after the funeral.

An item that is not complimentary, but which has a direct impact on postmortem and funeral-food habits is a book and thank-you-note kit sold by funeral homes. The kits include thank-you cards and their envelopes, a decorated and embossed three-ring binder with preprinted pages, paper for the funeral programs, and a small pamphlet, all branded and displaying the same art. The binder includes pages for recording funeral attendees as well as pertinent information about the service such as the officiants, the pallbearers, and the music. Called *A Guide to Help You Record and Remember*, the pamphlet has a few pages of printed text to remind the reader to conduct 'often overlooked' tasks in a wide variety of scenarios, such as contacting the Probate Court to sending thank-you notes to friends who offer rides during the bereavement. However, the majority of the pages are numbered, blank,

lined pages for recording floral tributes, telephone calls received, guests, and what is referred to as the Food Record.

The Food Record consists of four columns. The first column, marked 'No.', has prefilled numerals to denote the order in which the food gifts are received. These numbers correspond to numerical stickers, which are supposed to be removed from the booklet and placed on the dish the food item was delivered in. However, as there is only one sticker per numeral, this system breaks down with multiple food gifts. Thus, most food providers place a sticker with their name and address pre-printed on it (these are also used for stationary) or a piece of painter's tape with their name written on it on the dishes and cutlery they provide. The second column has space for the food provider's name, the third for the types of food and types of containers provided, and the fourth for the date that thank-you notes were sent. At the top of the Food Record is the instruction 'Record each gift of food and place a numbered sticker on the dish that corresponds to the number next to the donor's name.'

The mass-produced nature of this pamphlet acknowledges the cultural expectations of funeral food in this region. These booklets are expected in locations where food is being delivered and are used promptly to record gifts entering the area. Likewise, while the specific stickers within the booklet are often unused, their existence demonstrates a local knowledge of the commonly held practices used to return dishes to their owners. Finally, the pamphlet also highlights the common practice of sending thank-you notes in acknowledgment of funeral and postmortem food gifts. While this practice was not spoken of in interviews, it was visible during ethnographic observations; women of the bereaved family would try to mail thank-you notes within two weeks of the funeral service.

Location

After discussing what and how funeral and postmortem food gifts are provided, the last element of material culture that should be highlighted is where these gifts are given. As seen on the blogs in the previous chapter, there is a frequentative tendency for local participants in Southern funeral and postmortem food traditions to see a change in venue as a major deviation in tradition. This is connected to Sarah Atkinson, Ronan Foley, and Hester Parr's observations that location influences both subjective and objective realities and that 'there is a rich and growing body of research across social, cultural and health geographies that makes space for and foregrounds place in much more explicit ways' (2015: 2). The subjective experience of location and the acknowledgment of the shift in the physicality of Southern funerals, and correspondingly Southern funeral and postmortem food location, was something the research participants were explicitly aware of. All participants that had lived through the era, even as young children, noted that the end of the 1960s or the first half of the 1970s marked an end of home funerals in the area. Likewise, this alteration in the tradition was acknowledged and discussed during viewings and funeral-food events I attended over the duration of my fieldwork. Lee notes that

> A lot of times they would bring the bodies home, and they would be in a separate room, and they would set them up, and people would come. If they were at the funeral home someone would stay there all night. They didn't leave the body unattended. That was just a tradition…. Obviously if that was happening no one had a problem eating in the same place as the body.

Ellen attests that

> When I was a girl they use to keep the bodies at home. Everything would happen right in the house with food in the kitchen and dining room and the casket in the front parlor.

For the postmortem aspects of the local food tradition, all interview participants indicated that the appropriate location for food delivery is the home of the bereaved. However, not all bereaved would receive food at their home after the death of a loved one. In all instances where the location remained accessible, primary food delivery happened at the home of the deceased, no matter the size of the location or the home's capacity to hold and receive foodstuffs or guests. Only in instances when the deceased no longer had a permanent home that they controlled, such as in the case of an elderly relative who had moved to an assistive care facility or the deceased's having moved from the community, or lived apart and away, but had their body returned for burial, were the food gifts taken to the home of any other bereaved. Still, in almost all cases, the decision of whose home would receive the food gifts remained formulaic, although participants did indicate that they might call peripheral members of the bereaved family or extremely close family friends (including pastors) of the deceased to confirm the location. In all instances when the deceased had an adult daughter with her own home in the community, the food gifts would be delivered there. If the deceased had no daughter, food would be delivered to the home of a sister or the home of the eldest married son. In all instances, it was indicated that if at all possible the food gifts should be made to the "most responsible" female member of the deceased's family if the home of the deceased was not available. This concept of responsibility did not seem to be abstract as well. Respondents indicated that the location of the food was also the location in which decisions about the funeral would be made:

> People start bringing food to the house as soon as word of the death gets out. It's a real blessing to have that food there when you are sitting around trying to decide what to do. – Lewis

One notable aspect of this tradition can be observed: If individuals cannot make it to the home of the deceased or the appropriate alternate location to present a food gift to the family when it is known the house will be manned, food gifts can and will be passed to the bereaved family at the viewing or even the funeral service itself. In all instances where this behavior was observed during the fieldwork, the individuals presenting the food gift at these locations were of two types. The first and most common were female co-workers of one of the principal mourners. As people whose relationships were dependent on work, most often they were unavailable to drop off food gifts during hospitable times for the community. There was also sometimes mention of the co-worker not knowing the home address of the deceased or how to contact their bereaved co-worker outside of business hours. The second and less common givers of food gifts at a viewing or funeral are distantly related individuals who traveled to the area exclusively for the viewing or funeral. Perhaps due to the quick planning time of Southern funerals, many individuals can only attend one aspect, most likely the viewing. Often driving one to three hours to attend this event, distant family members attend the evening viewings after work and return home the same night. This turnaround does not allow them to visit the home of the deceased, and thus the food gifts are presented during or immediately following the visitation.

However, if there is a consistency of practice in the location of the postmortem food traditions in the American South, there are multitudinous expressions of the location of Southern funeral-food traditions:

> I've been to a few funerals in [all of the surrounding towns and counties]. I have been to one funeral at a community center because the funeral was so large that no one house would have been large enough to hold everyone. I've been to a couple where the gatherings

> were at the church in the fellowship center afterwards. Most of the time [the funeral meal] has been at somebody's house. – Viola

There is no mention of funeral meals happening in hotels, as Bailey lists as a common location in a British context, or the 'restaurants and caterers today' (2006: 5) that Thursby describes as the typical American experience – though perhaps tellingly no regional identity is tied to this description. Instead, three possibilities for funeral-food locations are given. The location that all participants agree is the most likely and most common location is the home of the deceased. This placement follows the same logic as the food delivery above. This is most likely because food that was delivered during the postmortem period is expected to be served to supplement and bolster the food provided for the funeral meal. By having the funeral meal at the location that already contains the bulk of the food planned to be consumed, no problems of re-transport of forgotten items arise:

> When Momma died [in the nursing home], she died before Deddy, I think we went to my sister's house. When Deddy died, [my sister was sick] so everyone came down here. We just had a house full of people with everyone visiting and bringing things. – Frank

> My mother's death was a shock. So on top of having to deal with the hospital, and the arrangements, and letting the kids know that grandma wasn't going to come home and that we weren't going to be able to go trick or treating – it was Halloween – I knew I had to get all of us and the house ready for people to bring food over. There was a constant stream of women from the church and the school where my mother and I both subbed bringing food over from that point until the after the funeral when everyone came back for that meal.
> – Norma

The second most common location for a post funeral meal is in a church's fellowship hall or community center. However, that does not make a church meal a common occurrence. During my fieldwork, I was unable to attend any funeral meals that were located within churches, although I had attended one before beginning this research. Several factors contribute to the decline in church-based funeral-food

events. While the decrease in church attendance in general is something that will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter, it is important to note that participants themselves note a marked shift in church attendance since the 1980s. Likewise, smaller church cemeteries are additionally losing the ability to accept as many interments due to both the lack of space and the rising cost of equipment. As commercial cemeteries gain in prominence, the physicality of the funeral is shifted away from and out of the church, with highly religious services happening within the funeral home or at the graveside. Even if the service is held at the deceased's church, the police-led motor procession from the church to the cemetery often leaves participants far away from the church buildings themselves. Thus, church-based funeral meals seem most possible when situated around a small geographic area. It is also important to note that several denominational and individual church groups in the area shrink from the convention of investing in facilities to accommodate funeral-food events:

> There has always been the tradition, at least where I have been around, where the funeral would happen and then you would go back to a church or a home, generally it was a church where I've been, for the meal…. Usually a service in a church, a burial there, and then you come back to the church or the home and there will be food set out. I mean a monstrous amount of food. – Nathen
>
> For one my aunt's funeral was in her church, it's the same church that my family has been going to for generations and half of my family are buried in the churchyard and the other half are just down the road in the main cemetery. For my aunt we had her funeral, went and interred the body, and we came back to the church and there was food….For my other aunt's funeral it was very much the same situation. The cemetery where my aunt was buried was the same cemetery that my great-great-great-grandfather is buried [in]…. We had a visitation at the funeral home that everyone in my family had been buried in from time immemorial, we actually had a graveside service, and then we went back to my cousin's, my aunt's daughter's, house. – Cynthia

Finally, participants acknowledged that it was possible for a funeral meal to be served at a community center, even though most of them had never attended one

there. It was suggested that this was only a viable alternative if the deceased had been such a bastion of the community that a single home could not accommodate the crowd. In this case, it was also suggested that the specific community center should have some significance to the deceased or bereaved in question.

Conclusion

Practical support given by family, friends, neighbors, and the wider community to the bereaved is not an uncommon theme in social research surrounding death from the monetary gifts of rural Japan (Kim 2015) or in-kind gifts seen in China (Chen 2014) seen internationally, to the continuing practices seen in Indian-American (Purnell and Paulanka 1998: 303, Manian and Bullock 2016), Arab American (Varga, McClam, Hassane 2015), Turkish American (Yesil 2013: 241), Latin American (Younoszai 1993, Del Gaudio et al 2013, Bitting 2014), African American (Rosenblatt and Wallace 2005, Miller 2015) and Jewish American (Wilson 2007: 148, Popovsky 2014, Grollman 2015) communities.

However, this study varies in some key ways from the above allowing it to make additions to the field. Primarily, the inherently comparative natures of the above examples imply an underlying comparison with an imagined normative experience that has not been examined, at least in part, until this study. That being said, other differences also emerge. While most practical contributions listed above take the form of monetary gifts as in the above Asian examples, specific symbolic gifts like the round foods of the Jewish Shiva (Weinstein 2003), or even the rarest examples of food gifts being made directly by the deceased to the funeral participants via pre-funeral planning (Hattori and Ishida 2012), the examples from the American

South given above instead show a relational nature. What I mean by 'relational nature' is that, instead of gifts being monetary (and as such their ultimate use completely determined by the recipient), directly in-kind meaning their form is being determined by the original, historic gift, or ritually or symbolically prescribed, relational gifts are instead chosen, made, given, and consumed in a geography of material and cultural dialogue where personal history and social requests interplay to influence the production of material objects.

Postmortem and funeral-food traditions are a large part of the material culture surrounding death in the American South. The material culture of death, dying, and bereavement is a subject that scholars have a growing awareness of, but as Jenny Hockey, Carol Komaromy, and Kate Woodthorpe display (2010), that focus is all too often on the body itself as a material object or the landscapes of death being limited to professional spaces. Here, however, the landscape of death is expanded to include not only the homes of the bereaved receiving funerary and postmortem food gifts, but the stores and kitchens in which community members make or procure that food and the pathways used for transportation. The announcement of a bereavement in the social network is both a call to action as well as information on a specific individual's death. This call to action is answered by the creation, delivery, presentation, and consumption of socially approved food items in conventional locations, often via networks where neither those foodstuffs nor places need to be asked about or confirmed. While this chapter examined what and how foodstuff is chosen, prepared, and delivered, as well as the physical and social landscapes in which these activities happen, the next chapter of this thesis will examine the socio-

religious context of the area and determine how participants feel their traditions and beliefs are connected.

Chapter 7
Church Ladies and Fellowship Halls: Religiosity and Southern Funeral Food

Introduction

As in chapter 6, the analysis in this chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork data and interviews collected during fieldwork. Chapter 3 established the boundaries of what participants in this area consider the funeral; chapter 5 gave examples of how individuals from similar backgrounds write about Southern funeral food online and how the subject is depicted in popular culture; and chapter 6 delineated the specific material culture of the Southern funeral and postmortem food traditions, including physical locations in which the exchange and consumption of food gifts take place. While religion has been a constant presence in each of these chapters, this chapter addresses it more directly. As Fredrik Fahlander and Terje Oestigaard state in the opening chapter of *The Materiality of Death*, 'apart from eschatological beliefs, the most important religious ideas with cosmological consequences for people's future on earth are materialized, of which the materiality of death in general and funeral monuments in particular are the most splendid, extravagant and colossal' (2008: 9). However, eschatological beliefs of death are not simply a matter of received theology; they are also shaped by the lived experiences and understandings of the people experiencing the applied aspects of these beliefs.

Acknowledging Fahlander's and Oestigaard's point that the material aspects of religious ideas surrounding death and the afterlife are vitally important to the vernacular lived experience, the matter of Southern funeral and postmortem food

traditions will act as the central lens that I will use in this chapter to examine the interplay between conceptualizations of religious life and the assumed expectations already discussed within these traditions. Denominational and individual variance will be examined to show the connection between personal and regional religious identity and the extant expressions of Southern funeral and postmortem food traditions.

Christian Values

Nowhere in my fieldwork did I observe funeral and postmortem food gifts being explained or justified as explicitly evangelical doctrine or practice, nor did any informant indicate such. Instead, when mentioned to me, funeral-food offering participants framed the gifts as Christian generosity and, when discussed with each other, framed them as an expression of Christian fellowship or brotherhood. These ideas of Christian generosity and fellowship mirror Elisha's observations of Evangelical Protestant Christianity discussed in chapter 4. Quite often the food practice was framed as 'just the Christian thing to do,' and was not further reflected upon:

> I've never really thought about why we do it. It's just seen as the Christian thing to do. —Mary Michael

When asked about the practice Frank adds,

> Why wouldn't we do it? We're good Christians. You don't want to leave people alone thinking about cooking at a time like that.

The understanding of this practice as more than simply evangelical, more than just Christian even, and instead "just the thing to do," reinforces the practice in a peculiarly effective way.

We can understand the pervasiveness and persistence of the funeral-food gift practice as resulting from the meeting of Evangelical Christianity and sentimentality. As Todd Brenneman (2014) has shown, sentimentality is a major impetus of evangelical action amongst the evangelical community. Lauren Berlant, a noted scholar on American sentimentality, defines the concept as

> not just the mawkish, nostalgic, and simpleminded mode with which it's conventionally associated, where people identify with wounds of saturated longing and suffering, and it's not just a synonym for a theatre of empathy: it is a mode of relationality in which people take emotions to express something authentic about themselves that they think the world should welcome and respect; a mode constituted by affective and emotional intelligibility and a kind of generosity, recognition, and solidarity among strangers. (McCabe 2011)

Berlant's conception of sentimentality in McCabe's (2015) interview blends seamlessly with Elisha's observations on evangelical sociality in chapter 4. Due to the ubiquity of evangelical thinking and influence on the area, embedded community members value evangelical concepts of community, social cohesiveness, and social observation and come together around major transitional life events such as a death in the community. To facilitate this coming together, generosity amongst the Christian brotherhood is accepted as an emotionally real ideal and truth for the community as a whole. This blending of fellowship and idealized generosity, in turn, creates a self-reinforcing relational model: in an effort to express evangelical values of Christian community membership, evangelicals visit members of their extended community during times of bereavement. This is an ongoing practice in the community, and, individually, a practice that repeatedly happens over the course of one's life. The food gift and visiting tradition is seen as an authentic expression of an emotional ideal creating a sentimental connection. This connection makes the

individual more likely to participate in the food gift process when they are not the bereaved, thus renewing the cycle again.

The above notion of Evangelical Christian socialization directly influences the conception of funeral food as well. In an editorial in a regional newspaper, Severo Avila (2016) writes of the '"food ministry" "common to Southern Protestant churches."' Avila describes how, after the death of each of his grandparents

> the people of the church had prepared the most delicious meal for the family. It was quite a spread. And I marveled that although Pawpaw and Mawmaw considered Rockmart First Baptist their home church, most of the other family members did not. We're scattered across the county and across the state. But the church's food ministry still did their best to prepare a great meal for the grieving family.

Avila says of the second funeral that

> At the grave site, the pastor mentioned that if we cared to return to the church after the burial, there would be food for the family. I was instantly reminded of last year's feast and my stomach immediately started grumbling…. As soon as we entered the church's fellowship hall (or whatever it is they call that nice, big side building) I could smell the fried chicken…. The family gathered in a large sitting area where tables were set for us. As soon as a prayer was said, we filed into the kitchen to fill our plates with the most delicious Southern food you've ever tasted. There was, of course, fried chicken. But there was also potato salad, green beans, butter beans, creamed potatoes, pasta salad, several casseroles, cornbread and even ham. And, naturally, there was an entire table dedicated to desserts of all sorts. I grabbed a big glass of sweet tea and marveled that we were being treated so generously by people who probably had no idea who we were. Like I said, this was Mawmaw's home church but not so for the rest of us. These people didn't know us from Adam's house cat and yet they served us as if we had been attending church there all our lives.

Unlike the mainly home-based funeral-food gatherings described in the previous chapter, Avila's account shows some important differences. With the home-based meals described previously, where participants travel from the cemetery to the home of the deceased and begin eating on their own schedule when they arrive, the location

of the funeral meal in the public church space both centralizes and formalizes the event. Participants did not eat on arrival, but instead waited for most participants to arrive so the meal could be started with a prayer. This act reinforces the religiosity of the moment and is absent in many if not most home funeral-food events due to the ad hoc arrival of participants. Likewise, the physical space of the home means that food at home-based events is not eaten as a full, sit-down table meal. The church-centered funeral meal's location in a large hall means that food is centered around circular or long rectangular tables. As such, the meal is consumed in discrete groups and discourages the mobility of the participants.

This lack of participant circulation makes the movement of the congregation members even more apparent. Avila notes that

> although it was a sad day, saying goodbye to Mawmaw, I felt a little inspired that the tradition of a food ministry was not yet dead. The members of this church worked hard preparing delicious dishes for strangers and then served us. They walked around with pitchers to refill our glasses and made sure we had everything we needed.

Individuals acting in a service capacity during the postmortem and funeral-food events, and the fact that the individuals that do so are mostly women, will be explored in more depth in the next chapter. For the purpose of the current discussion, what is important is that the acts of service to the bereaved are attributed not to individuals' actions of their own volition, but collectively to members of the church congregation. This tacitly connects the act of serving food and drink at the funeral meal to the concept of Christian service and evangelical communality. The phrasing of the practice as 'not yet dead' connects Avila's experience to Berlant's conception of sentimentality. Participants see this form of service as an authentic expression of Protestant Evangelical Christian ideals of service and community. Likewise, the

authenticity of the event is reinforced by the event's nature as both culturally embedded and yet, simultaneously, seemingly spontaneous. The culturally embedded nature allows the participants to have practiced social cues and responses to the event. Simultaneously, because of the lack of a formal notification process, the embedded practices can appear spontaneous, as in Avila's description, and thus seem more authentic.

Denominational Differences

Portions of chapter 4 and the previous section in this chapter established the influences Evangelical Protestant Christianity has on the socio-cultural makeup and behavior pattern in my Northwest Georgia fieldwork location; a demonstratively large portion of the population identifies as Evangelical Protestant Christian, and no other religious group in the area maintains a membership that can rival that visibility. Rival visibility decreases even further when total Christian belief is taken into account. Thus, Evangelical notions such as a singular view of Christian socialization and community observation pervade the area. However, that does not mean there is a singular global evangelicalism or even a singular expression of Evangelical Protestant Christianity in this community. Instead, standard practice- and doctrine-based distinctions exist based on denominations, and those denominational differences have a direct impact on the expression of postmortem and funeral-food activities in the region.

David Barrett, George Thomas Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson define a denomination as 'an organized aggregate of worship centers or congregations of similar ecclesiastical tradition within a specific country … whose component

congregations and members are called by the same denominational name in different areas, regarding themselves as one autonomous Christian church distinct from other denominations, churches, and traditions' (2001: 555). Denominations are self-identified, discrete religious organizations, based in and on the social mores of a specific country, recognizable to wider audiences, and possessing a consistent internal theology and practice. Because of the specific, place-centered knowledge inherent in the concept of a denomination, denominations can and do act as ad hoc shorthand to convey an individual's, family's, or group's values during social interactions. Likewise, general uses of denominational titles can often be made more specific if extra clarity is needed. During my fieldwork, participants and people I interacted with often described themselves and their denominational affiliation as Baptist, even though Baptist is more clearly consigned to a movement instead of a denomination — at times, participants even described their religion as Baptist (Yarnell 2005: 1). Only when the individual needed to draw specific distinctions would they align themselves with a specific congregation, such as Primitive Baptist, Southern Baptist, or Independent Baptist, just to list a few practicing in the area. The appropriateness of musical performances, male and female interactions, the order of services, and even facilities' structures can be denominational dividing factors, and an individual's denomination can also play a key factor in their specific expectations and expression of the area's postmortem and funeral-food traditions.

As shown in chapter 6, media about Southern postmortem and funeral-food traditions often refer to these denominational differences in passing. Gayden Metcalfe and Charlotte Hays's work, *Being Dead is no Excuse: The Official Southern Ladies Guide to Hosting the Perfect Funeral*, devotes an entire chapter,

"The Methodists Ladies vs. the Episcopal Ladies," to discussing the differences between denominations and denominational patterns of funeral-food gifts, stating that the more hidebound Episcopalians prefer aspic, small rolls, cheese straws, and fudge cake, all laid out and presented on recently polished silver, while summing up the Methodists with the line, 'You can always tell when a Methodist dies—there are lots of casseroles' (2005: 5). Metcalfe and Hays go on to describe how popular and enjoyable the Methodists' 'funeral goo' is, even to Episcopalians. The term *funeral goo* categorizes portable communal dishes made with canned soups or Velveeta, a processed cheese used in dips and casseroles. The inclusion of these goos at funeral events offers a variety of functional options. The dishes themselves are reported in Metcalfe and Hays, on internet blogs and forums, and in interviews as both filling and comforting, thus making it possible to efficiently feed a large crowd while providing a familiar dish conceptually connected to ideas of home. Because goos typically contain a variety of highly processed foods, they have a longer shelf life and are useful for longer events, where food temperature might otherwise be an issue.

It is important to keep in mind that, while Metcalfe and Hays discuss these dishes as denominational in character, class may actually be the metric under discussion. Metcalfe and Hays both refer to polished silver dishes at one event, strong markers of class but not actually strong Episcopalian symbols. Indeed, Sean McCloud shows how class has long been tied to denominational membership in the American South and how that membership can substitute for class in vernacular conversations (McCloud 2009: 1, 159, 171). Beyond denomination, socio-economic class and the affordability and availability of particular serving dishes, utensils,

ingredients, and foods form part of the greater narrative here (see Hillard and Cobb 2014, Wallach 2009).

This complex relationship between class and denomination is brought into sharp focus in the North Georgia field site of my participant observations and interviews. Class in the American South is particularly stratified and complicated, linked to family ties, location, denomination, congregation, education, accent, employment, and economic well-being. While class is often coded as denomination in the American South, this multivalent coding is not always straightforward or universal.[25] In any given locale, one denomination may have several churches, and each one may be of a different class: there may, for instance, be the 'nice' Baptist church, the mill workers' Baptist church, and the country Baptist church, each with its particular cultures linked to the socioeconomic class of its members. Junior Leaguers, not mill workers, eat aspic and mayonnaise in the South, and the socioeconomic character of the congregation with Junior League members (or mill workers) will be marked by their particular dishes. A large portion of the local population at my field site identifies as members of the Baptist Church, where locally there is a wider division of social and economic power within the community. Both poor and wealthy citizens occupy the same denominational category in this field site, and locally, specific congregations rather than entire congregations serve as class markers. This field site is not unique in this respect; across the South, denomination

[25] See Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt, *A Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food* (Athens: U of Georgia, 2011); Lucy M. Long, *Regional American Food Culture* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2009): 19–28; Beth A. Latshaw, "Food for Thought: Race, Region, Identity, and Foodways in the American South," *Southern Cultures* 15, no. 4 (2009): 106–28; and Mary Rizzo, "The Cafe Hon: Working-Class White Femininity and Commodified Nostalgia in Postindustrial Baltimore," *Dixie Emporium: Tourism, Foodways, and Consumer Culture in the American South*, ed. Anthony J. Stanonis (Athens: U of Georgia, 2008): 264–86.

is used as a rough marker of class, but within any particular region, congregational specifics make the congregation a more precise and useful indicator. In interviews that inform this project, naming specific congregations allows for a more nuanced discussion of religion to emerge, even though categories based on congregation rather than denomination still carry implicit references to both class and race. For instance, a casserole that is considered fancy, perhaps asparagus casserole as one informant suggested, may mark the giver as a member of the Main Street Baptist Church, while a humbler offering, such as the ubiquitous hash-brown casserole, might signal the bearer is part of a more rural congregation.

Metcalfe and Hays may admit that the subjects of their book partake in a toddy or two after the funeral, but their focus tends to be a humorous take on the social differences and rivalries between Methodists and Episcopalians in their area of the Delta (2009: 27). In interviews, however, the public consumption of or abstention from alcohol at funerals emerges as one of the most important markers for group membership and an important aspect of displaying that group's religious denomination. Ellen, an informant I was able to interview as she arranged flowers for the altar guild of a local Episcopal church, mentioned that the best-received funeral-food gift she provides is a plastic cooler filled with Coca-Colas, wine, and beer. However, she was quick to mention that this practice only works well when she knows that the deceased and members of their immediate family are also Episcopalian; if they are Baptists, she feels compelled to replace the beer with bottled water.[26] Ellen expressed not only that the gift of alcohol would not be

[26] Southern Baptists, by long tradition, do not drink alcohol. For a modern statement on alcohol use by the Southern Baptist Convention, see the 2006 Southern Baptist Convention Resolution, "On Alcohol Use in America," http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1156, accessed 14 September 14, 2015. Many other Baptist denominations share this practice.

appreciated by any Baptist families — even if they did drink it in the normal course of their lives — but that it might both offend them and mark her as an outsider. This is why Ellen relegates her gifts of wine and beer to her fellow Episcopalian congregation members — not for financial reasons, but because they are the only members of the community she can give them to without committing a *faux pas* or creating a social rift. While most informants agree that food gifts across Christian denominations in the area have the same social norms, alcohol emerges as a strong dividing line. 'People drink coffee during funerals for some reason. We have a lot of sweet tea. There's no beer, you know, because we're Baptist,' commented Bev, another informant.

Church Groups

This perception of Christian universality may exist because women connected to church groups tend to perpetuate the traditions. One informant, a teacher named Karen, shared that when a teaching assistant with whom she worked had a death in the family, she and her coworkers coordinated to pool money to bring the bereaved family a deli cold-cut platter and bread. However, Karen went on to note that if her relationship to the bereaved had been personal instead of professional, or if the bereaved had been part of her church community, her reaction would have been different. In those more intimate cases, Karen explained, a women's Bible study group or a woman of the church group would have stepped up to coordinate the food gifts for the time surrounding the funeral. This planning would ensure both that enough food would be present for the extended event and that the food present would be, in the words of my informants, 'appropriate' to the family and the funeral

environment — that is, traditional to the occasion and/or matched to the family's size, taste, and/or religious beliefs. A new dish, for instance, may not be appropriate if it does not conform to community standards for funerals. Karen also said she assumed this was happening in the teaching assistant's case, but as outsiders to the family's inner circle, she and her colleagues would be unaware of it. For Karen, this lack of a more personal relationship and lack of knowledge of specific religious background made the 'generic' gift of a deli tray more appropriate. However, although this kind of intimacy stops at the bounds of the church community, in the context of funeral food, the church community itself takes on a more inclusive nature. In two separate interviews, sisters Bev and Denise noted that the involvement of church women extended to members of the congregation who had not been active participants in the church community for many years prior to a loved one's death. Another informant, Lee, reiterated this point, adding that in her church, several different women's groups rotated the responsibility of funeral-food gifts and preparation so as to not unduly burden a single member or group in their community. Becky, an informant who no longer identifies with a specific denomination, noted that although she has been outside a specific church community for over twenty years, 'The little old church ladies from the communities I grew up in still come if we have a death near them.' She added that the 'church ladies' always bring the most food and try to manage the event, even if that management is unwanted. Funeral-food gifts are thus a Maussian *préstation totale*, magically recreating the social fabric to include the long-departed and create a bridge between the living and the dead for the recently departed to cross over.[27]

[27] This community-based food gift exchange creates a reciprocal gifting system as explored by Marcel Mauss and E. E. Evans-Pritchard in *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*

Individual Expressions of Religion

Religiosity in the South is not exhibited solely in collective action or expression. As Brian Harrison and Melissa Michelson remind us, 'In the American South, for example, religious attitudes are so much more a part of daily life that the region is commonly referred to as the Bible Belt' (2015: 1414), and this overcultural acknowledgment of the region's overt Christian religiosity is a label by and large worn with pride amongst those I observed. While I was able to outline how the overall religious climate impacted the general fieldwork area and specific church and denominational communities above, it bears acknowledging that the above factors are not always, or even often, overtly acknowledged in individuals' day-to-day lives or in standard social interactions during or pertaining to postmortem and funeral-food events. Instead, an individual's specific identity as a Christian is most referred to. However, the recipients and viewers of these individual expressions of Christian charity and service often take this expression of personal identity and values as representative and indicative of the overall community, thus reinforcing appreciated social mores.

Identity: Just the Christian Thing to Do

During my fieldwork, and as seen in the online media posts in chapter 5, the preparation and delivery of food gifts after a death in the extended social network is a learned rapid-response social convention in the American South. However, when questioned as to why this tradition is still carried out, many informants had to pause

(New York: Norton, 1967). For a greater exploration of this concept see Robert T. Green and Dana L. Alden, "Functional Equivalence in Cross-Cultural Consumer Behavior: Gift Giving in Japan and the United States," *Psychology & Marketing* 5, no. 2 (1988): 155–168.

for a significant interlude to consider the question before answering. Upon reflection, respondents gave varied answers, ranging from Southerners' still valuing community and family more than elsewhere in the United States or acknowledging they had never considered the question before and had simply assumed the practice was universal. However, the majority of individuals reported that their identity as Christian was the impetus to continue participating in the postmortem and funeral-food tradition:

> Well, a death is always hard you know. I guess I do it because I was taught to be a good Christian and it lets the family just worry about grieving. – Luann

> I don't know why we do it. I guess because it's just the Christian thing to do.
> – Denise

> You know you are being a good Christian when you help them after a death. That's when people need a lot of, umm, help. – Ellen

In areas such as Northwest Georgia, the high number of churches 'lend[s] material form to religious identity and provide[s] hard evidence of its social importance and power. Accordingly, for people who identify with the religious group that these buildings reflect, being immersed in such spaces may represent something of a physical 'stairway to heaven' — making them feel better not only about the world, but also about themselves' (Ysseldyk, Haslem, and Morton 2016: 19). This creates a social environment where, due to the large number of physical spaces and material objects that are a part of the lived environment of Northwest Georgia, individuals exist within a self-reinforcing cycle where the local build geography improves positive identity and attitudes and in return people's positive attitudes and identities impact and expand the material culture and environment:

> When you take food to the house or the church hall, you know it is the Christianly thing to do. You can see how hard their grief and you know you are doing the right thing. – Catherine
>
> It's just how we were raised. We always had food at the house, but when I was little my church's fellowship hall had these long tables where people would bring in and put the food. There was everything there and everyone always came. The old country churches don't have anything like that, but they have these poured concrete tables outside. You can see them as you are driving around. –James
>
> We're supposed to love thy neighbor. In the South food is love, and when you drop off something and it is put on their table or the counter in a fellowship hall or whatever they know they are being loved. – Bev

When questioned, some participants report individual notions of Christian service as the impetus for engaging in the area's postmortem and funeral-food traditions. Indeed, only those who no longer identify as active or practicing Christians do not identify the above notions, instead explaining the food traditions as heritage activities. However, as shown above, Christian identity is highly prominent in the region, and therefore this tendency towards religious explanations should be noted as significant of the area's overculture. Even non-Christians, as in James's story, show a tendency to attribute or link the practices to religious observations from their youth.

What's Bad for the Giver is Perfect for the Receiver

Informants showed a marked distinction when speaking about funeral-food gifts, and the conceptualizations of food changed depending on if food gifts were said to be given or received. In this regard, any food gift was considered acceptable when it was received, but this was not the case when informants reported on giving food gifts. What begins to appear is two interdependent social traditions with specific ingrained behaviors surrounding postmortem and funeral-food traditions.

In traditional settings, women have been shown to be the guardians of tradition and to be a driving force in their maintenance and of cultural norms, which can especially be true in food based situations (Joseph 2016). As reported by the informants, the giver is expected to provide the best possible food gift, following the concept of 'normal but nice' as defined in the previous chapter:

> There are just some things that everyone knows not to bring. Green salads, ribs, bbq, hamburgers, umm, hotdogs all are good, but you would never bring them to a funeral. - Rose

This is a policed behavior, especially amongst women in the extended social network. Indeed, Francesca Cancian's (1987) study on the ways in which romantic love is feminized in contemporary American culture illustrates how the gendering of love placed more responsibility on women as guardians, keepers, and caretakers of close relationships. Dakota further describes this process in the production of funeral food:

> I watched my Granny and Great-Granny and that is how I learned to bring stuff. You make the food with love to help the people that have lost someone and let them know you are there. There are always aunts and cousins whispering to you to do things like take out the trash and wash up so you are never at a loss for something to do – you always know.

Since food is often described as love, the policing of food follows a similar trajectory as Cancian describes. In Stephanie Shield's work on gender and emotion, she discusses the ways in which beliefs about emotions resulting in a 'network of beliefs in the basis for expectations we develop about when, where, and how emotion should occur and what the occurrence of emotion signifies. These *bedrock beliefs* are so embedded within the dominant culture that they seem unquestionably to embody the

true nature of emotion' (2002: 10).[28] Even the policing of funeral foods by older women is described in terms of sentimentality:

> The little old church ladies always took control, but they were also always really sweet about it. We had one family move into our neighborhood from the Great Lakes area. She wanted to help and get involved, but she had no idea what to do you know? One of the little old ladies went over to her house and talked her out of making fudge before her first funeral with the women of the church. – Viola

Furthermore, failure to produce the correct gift or perform the right action may be seen as a familial failure, especially that of a mother:

> If you bring the wrong thing, or heaven forbid don't bring anything, you know those old women are going to be leaning over and whispering that "her momma didn't raise her right." – Jewel

However, the receiver does not turn down any food gift — all gifts are deemed acceptable from the receiver's point of view, and the receiver is always grateful for the gift. As Jorge Cruz-Cárdenas, Reyes González, and M. Teresa del Val Núñez (2015) have noted in their work on consumer behavior around disliked gifts, a receiver may use a disliked gift as a way of protecting the relationship, which could lead to later repeats and further unsatisfactory purchases; additionally, an expensive gift does not necessarily predict whether the gift will be well received. Because food gifts are not retail purchases and are typical perishable in nature, they cannot be returned to a third-party supplier or businesses. Moreover, the food gift is often expected to be utilized by the bereaved shortly after they receive the gift, or the gift may be part of a larger potluck where, again, the food is expected to be consumed.

[28] Emphasis in the original.

Coupled with the above, there is a deep concern expressed by informants that a part of the funeral will not be attended, or that attendance would be so low as to not be considered a proper tribute to the deceased:

> Well, mother was afraid that no one was going to come, and that's why she only wanted Graveside and not a Service. But so many people came, and everyone brought something. There was food everywhere. It was a real testament to Mother. – Bev

The specificity of proper food gifts is instead generalized when discussed from the perspective of a recipient:

> I didn't really care what there were bringing [after her mother died]; I was just glad I didn't have to deal with worrying about that, and you know, you just hope they come at all. – Ellen

One of the reasons for this gratefulness may be because by expressing gratitude, community cohesion can be more assured. Food gifts can thus act a means by which personal relationships are expressed, 'Objects derive identity or meaning from the specific personal relationships in which they are transacted or in which they feature. A particular variety of wine may have a general cultural meaning, but when we drink it at dinner it also has an identity that reflects our relationship with each other' (Carrier 1991: 132). Additionally, there may perhaps be some anxiety that no one will attend a portion of the funeral, a very significant and emotionally poignant event. If no one were to come to the funeral or provide food gifts, this would be taken as a sign that the deceased was unloved, forgotten, or was even considered a bad person. As Colin Camerer posits

> the sociologists' insistence that gifts convey meaning is much like the economists' idea that gifts are "signals" of information—that is, the intentions of partners in a personal relationship… The variety of sociological explanations for gift giving suggests a second explanation, that gifts might serve multiple signaling purposes simultaneously—signaling "willingness" to invest in a relationship,

> while also conveying meaning about the giver's tastes or identity or beliefs about the receiver. (1988: S119)

Thus, food gifts help not only to reinforce the bonds of the community, but they can also signal the importance of the deceased to both the community and to individuals. In a culture where food gifts are expected, their absence would be noteworthy.

When informants spoke about funeral-food traditions in generalities, they spoke of the process of giving food gifts to others. However, when informants talked more specifically about their personal experiences of funeral-food gifts, they spoke in terms of receiving gifts. As will be shown in the examples of these last three chapters, there are more rules to being a giver of food gifts and the act of giving is more heavily policed. Indeed, a poor receiver may be given the excuse of suffering from grief, as 'the relationship between gift transactors is inextricably linked to the transactions that take place within it, for those transactions express and recreate the relationship, and thus the identities of the people and even the objects that are encompassed by it' (Carrier 1991: 131). A poor receiver can thus be excused as being too emotionally distraught to properly display the expected performance of gratitude, thus preserving the relationship from deteriorating.

This leads to some inconsistencies in what informants report, mainly that they spend a significant amount of time speaking about how only specific food gifts are acceptable, but then report that they were happy to receive anything and that the specialness of the gift is instead in the general act of receiving a food gift – just receiving something is special. Still, by eating together, the gift is both material and experiential. Cindy Chan and Cassie Moglinger define experiential gifts as 'an event that the recipient lives through,' while a material gift is defined as, 'objects to be kept in the recipient's possession (e.g., jewelry or electronic gadgets)' (2017: 914). Due to

food's materiality, it can occupy both of these categories simultaneously, while its perishable nature and the societal expectations of sharing the food with its giver further places funeral-food gifts within the experiential. This latter aspect is significant, as Chan and Moglinger note that in their study, 'recipients felt more emotional when consuming experiential (vs. material) gifts, which served to strengthen their relationship with the gift giver. From this, we learn that gift givers seeking to foster closer relationships with their recipients are likely to achieve greater success by giving experiential gifts, rather than material gifts' (2017: 925). In the fieldwork location, the gifting, sharing, and joint consumption of funeral-food gifts may help to foster emotional bonds. There appears to be clear delineations in what is acceptable for individuals to gift one another, while there is instead a much more open attitude to receiving any food gifts, perhaps due to the notion that the food gifted is connected to ideas of Christian charity, community, and blessing, even if inappropriate gifts would still mark the giver as an outsider.

Conclusion

While individual expressions of religious identity spur many individuals to participate in the area's postmortem and funeral-food traditions, these selfsame actions are not necessarily received as such. As seen in examples such as Becky's account and Avila's newspaper editorial above, while personal notions of Christian service may encourage individuals to continue participating in local food-gifting customs, in many instances credit is given instead to collective groups of older women of the community colloquially refers to as *church ladies*. While I will discuss the gendered aspect of this practice in chapter 8, here it is important to note that

attribution is not usually given to individuals for the bulk of participation in the practice, but is instead given to collective church groups, imbuing the practice with greater religious significance. When most of the food is understood as coming from women in the church, it is easy to see how people might think that funeral food is a Christian practice; that Christian thought and ideals are normative social mores in the American Southern psyche further explains why my informants often thought everyone does funerals the same.

> 'When Mom died we were still really active in our local church. We both taught Sunday School every week and everything. When mom died the other ladies of the church really stepped up and took care of things, which was funny because Mom had been one of the main ones to do it before she died. They brought food to the house, and they really transformed the little church hall with the amount of food that was there after the funeral.' – Norma

Bridget specified that

> 'Usually it's the other women of the church that lead the food. So the widow's bible study group, or Sunday school class or some churches have specific groups for funeral food.'

Marilynn Brewer and Amy Harasty (1996) write that social perceivers do not take on the same level of social cohesion as social actors. With postmortem and funeral-food practices in the American South, the bereaved family is always juxtaposed to the food gift givers by dint of their station. In this way, during postmortem and funeral-food events, the bereaved family, though they are the impetus for action and do participate via receiving and consuming the food gifts, are in a way cast as social perceivers. Due to these separate positions, the bereaved family may perceive the unity of action as indicative of greater social unity and motivation. When asked about postmortem and funeral-food activities, all participants spoke first and primarily of their experience as recipients of postmortem and funeral-food gifts; they

spoke of their experiences as postmortem and funeral-food-gift givers supplementarily, or in contrast to a story of receiving food. Keeping Brewer and Harasty's work in mind, a trend emerges in which participants see and remember the practice not as inside givers but outside recipients. Perceptions of ingroup and outgroup membership can have more impact on individual action than actual membership does, and those perceptions can even be extended to media sources (as seen in chapters 4, 5, and the above), which can change how the overall situation is viewed (Stroud, Muddiman, and Lee 2014). These cultural perception factors do not maintain homogeneity across group boundaries, which may further explain why the American Southern postmortem and funeral-food traditions contrast other mortality-related food traditions in the United States (Ojalehto et al. 2015). Because of the differences between the perceived group dynamic and individual internal motivations for participation in a tradition, a situation develops in which, when receiving food gifts, recipients perceive gifts as collective formal religious devotion, while the individuals giving gifts perceive them as expressions of individual religion or heritage. The tendency to recall postmortem and funeral-food activities as recipients instead of givers flavors the perception of the entire tradition. Two interdependent social traditions surrounding the giving and receiving of food gifts can be seen. The giving of gifts is a highly policed behavior, which shows gendered engagements with the preparation of food gifts, while the receiving of food gifts reaffirms the deceased's and their survivors' importance in their particular social network and the community as a whole.

Chapter 8
Aunt Sally's Lemon Chiffon Cake: Family, Gender, and Southern Funeral Food

Introduction

The previous chapter showed that, although religious ideation functions as a systemic influence on the postmortem and funeral-food traditions in the American South, my research participants did not often overtly acknowledge them as known influences on the events. While I was in the field, participants often discussed family as a primary reason for the continuation of these food traditions. Likewise, as the theoretical discussion of the conceptualization of family in chapter 1 implies, this chapter will show the importance of extended family and close female friends of the family, who are functionally considered family-of-choice, to the local funeral-food process. In the discussion of postmortem and funeral-food traditions in the American South, family and gender are intrinsically linked; thus, this chapter weaves back and forth between the two topics. During my fieldwork, the participants, usually specific women acting as representatives of their families or churches, simultaneously presented postmortem and funeral-food gifts as being for the women of the household and for the bereaved family. In my sample and during my time in the field, funeral-food objects were often referred to as gifts from a household to another household. However, men and women reported highly varied experiences of the labor of funeral-food events. Women of the extended family and women who are family-of-choice have additional work in the household of the bereaved during the extended postmortem and funeral period. This difference in how household labor is

normatively attributed to household members allows men and women to experience the receipt of funeral-food gifts differently. However, the greater burden of labor is not questioned due to the cultural notion that food is love and to the fear of being seen as an ungrateful recipient. Finally, the dynamic tension between food and women's labor can be seen in the importance and preservation of heirloom recipes at funeral events.

Receiving Food

That both waged and non-waged labor performed by women is undervalued in most contemporary societies is a long-established fact in the allied social research fields.[29] Daniel L. Hicks, Estefania Santacreu-Vasut, and Amir Shoham (2015) show how notions of appropriate gender roles and the corresponding appropriateness of household labor are acquired early in life, are resistant to modification or change, and persist even in single occupant households in a study of immigrants living in America. While there has been growing, positive support for women to enter the workforce in America since the 1970s, notions that women should be the primary housekeepers remain prevalent (Donnelly et al. 2015).

In the Southern postmortem and funeral-food context, this creates an environment where, even after the creation and delivery of foodstuffs discussed in chapter 6, women are still expected to labor in the home of the bereaved, the church hall, or anywhere that postmortem or funeral food is presented or consumed. Likewise, there is an embedded cultural knowledge that the women of the

[29] For further reading of a seminal work on this topic see Barbara Reskin's 1988 work 'Bringing the Men Back in: Sex Differentiation and the Devaluation of Women's Work,' *Gender & Society* 2.1: 58–81.

community provide the majority of the labor for the event. One participant, Nathan, said ‘There has always been a tradition where I’ve been around that after a funeral you’d go back to the church or a home and the ladies of the congregation, I guess that’s being sexist, but generally it was the ladies would present a meal.’ Nathan provides an interesting comment: while the observation of women’s activity is not innately sexist, there is an underlying implication in the statement that a sexist observation might be found. In a separate part of the conversation, Nathen told me that when he became aware of a death notice, he would inform his wife so she could prepare to create food for both the postmortem period and the post-funeral meal. This conversation was consistent with my fieldwork observations. Without conversations about the sharing of labor, there was an expectation that women in a household would be the members of the family unit tasked to create food gifts, even if cooking duties were usually shared. If the uneven distribution of labor was remarked on at all, it was often in jokes about the women’s competence or the men’s ineptitude.

Especially with benevolent sexism, as Melanie M. Ayres, Carly K. Friedman, and Campbell Leaper (2009) have shown, casualness and humor may actually increase women’s perception of danger in sexist language, making them less likely to confront that type of speech. Matthew D. Hammond, Nickola C. Overall, and Emily J. Cross (2016) have recently shown that women’s perceptions of their male partners played a key role in their own endorsement of benevolent sexism across an extended time, meaning that if a beloved male partner seemed to embrace a benevolently sexist ideology, the female partner would as well. Likewise, though the study was conducted in a Japanese context, Mayumi Nakamura and Mito Akiyoshi found that ‘If a woman perceives that other wives in similar life settings are bearing with a

severely unbalanced household division of labor, then she sees her own unbalanced division of labor as fair and that state of affairs contributes to her overall happiness' (2015: n.p.). Thus, Nakamura and Akiyoshi show that unfair distribution of work between husband and wife may not be remarkable or noticed by the spouses and does not necessarily negatively impact the wife's happiness or satisfaction.

In the production of funeral-food items, the oldest woman in a household is not always the one tasked with receiving the food gifts during the postmortem and funerary period. Instead, other women who are emotionally close to the bereaved household step into the role of hostess. This means that often women who are family members of choice perform the majority of work inside the bereaved household:

> Our neighbor Lucy actually helped my mom a lot, and my Aunt Ann actually came down from Wisconsin. So my two aunts, Aunt Ann and Aunt Michiana, and our neighbor Lucy were pretty much constantly in the kitchen, in either all, you know, trying to keep my mom out when my grandmother died. At least two of them were always in the kitchen washing dishes, making sure there were cups, making sure the food was warm, making sure nothing got burned if it was on the stove, even if it wasn't food that they had cooked…. Now, Aunt Ann and Aunt Michiana and aren't blood-related to my Mother, but they have always been my aunts. –Viola

These voluntary aunts and sisters perform a large amount of elective work during the food events as well. During my fieldwork, in addition to washing dishes, making sure there are cups, plates, and other cutlery, warming food, and actual cooking as Viola mentions, I also observed women in this role moving furniture, scrubbing toilets and floors, moving cars in the driveway, taking out the rubbish, receiving the food gifts into the home, preparing and setting out or presenting the food, and providing emotional support for the bereaved.

Where there is not family-of-choice, or sometimes alongside them, women in the bereaved's extended family, often cousins or elderly aunts, tend to step into this labor-intensive role.

> People set up the kitchen for the food. Usually a friend that's really close or I do it at my cousins', and we try to keep the trash moving because you do tend to have a lot of garbage that you have to throw away. So me and my sister would bag up the garbage and put it in the garage so the family wouldn't have to. And buy tissues. We make sure there is tissues. – Denise

Respondents often spoke of this role as being fulfilled by a maiden aunt—that is to say elderly, unmarried women. However, during my fieldwork, I did not observe any women who would fit that criteria fulfilling this role. Instead, I usually observed middle-aged women who were second or third cousins to the bereaved or deceased, older widowed women, and older women who were still married but retired or without waged employment. These older women, if not family-of-choice, were usually aunts or great-aunts to the bereaved household. This additional labor means these women from the extended family and the family-of-choice spend more time in the bereaved's home than any other guests. At times, due to the family having to leave home to make the funeral arrangements, the women providing additional labor may spend more time in the home than the bereaved does. When the bereaved are out of the home, these women remain to receive food gifts and host visitors. This means that often when people visit the bereaved, they interact with these women even if the bereaved are in the home.

Because the food gifts must be delivered and received by individuals, individuals interact over the exchange and consumption of these food items. One informant, Dakota, said that 'Over the food you talk about anything really, but you talk about memories. You talk about the dead person, and the memories of them, and

the memories of people they shared time with too.' The importance of extended family's emotional support in African-American families and communities in the American South has been studied, but the academic gaze has not been turned on the white body in the same way; however, parallels can be drawn. In William Dressler's (1985) study, proximity and the exchange of story and narrative from extended family members form a major source of emotional support for Southern blacks, though the family support acts as an emotional buffer for men more effectively than it does for women. In my fieldwork, Richard noted, 'I remember being around a lot of people for a long time during, uh, during the funerals I went to. Talking and catching up with everyone — old family and friends. If someone was active and had a lot of friends they would be around for pretty much all day.'

Blessing versus Burden

Women from the extended family and the family-of-choice, as wider and support mourners, are not expected to respond to the postmortem and funeral-food gifts. As mentioned in chapter 6, women from the bereaved household attempt to send thank-you notes to acknowledge postmortem and funeral-food gifts within a fortnight of the interment. Gendered trends can also be observed in reactions within the far more informal acknowledgments of the food gifts that were observed in conversation. James said, 'It's a really blessing — the food you know. You don't know what to do, and the food is just there and you eat and feel better and fill up.' Here, James speaks as if the food simply appears, and in this way, diminishes the amount of work the women who prepare, deliver, and display the food gifts provide. Richard noted that 'it's kind of cool the idea of it. It's there as a comfort, and the idea

is that your family doesn't have to deal with that…. It was a blessing to have the food in the house for weeks after.' Richard repeats the idea that 'the family' need not worry about the food because of the gifts. However, this is demonstratively untrue. It is the men of the household or households of primary mourners that have nothing to worry about, and to a lesser extent the women of those self-same households. Individuals, especially women, who are acknowledged as family do provide a large amount of labor during this period.

Nathan also deemphasized the role of women:

> We were really torn up about my mom's funeral. I think we all showed up for that one. Having all of that food show up was a real blessing I'll be honest with ya. If we'd had to make do ourselves or go out to the… I, I, I. No. It was a true blessing when they brought that in. I'm thinking of my mother's death specifically. It was incredible. It was incredible. And when my father-in-law died we had so many people come down from middle Tennessee for that. There is no way that we could have fed them all without the family, church, and community coming together. Yes that was a blessing. A real blessing. It gave us a chance to talk and no one in the family had to take the initiative to do anything about the food. It was a blessing in that regard too.

As Nathen describes it, the food simply shows up. Little to no acknowledgment, and no specific acknowledgment, is given to the women who facilitate that food's showing up. Moreover, again, Nathen speaks of the family when he means the primary mourners of the immediately bereaved households. However, in the same statement, he speaks of the family coming together to work — implying multiple and multivalent notions of family in action.

All of my male participants[30] unequivocally describe the arrival of funeral-food gifts as a blessing, including Frank: 'We just had a houseful all the time. People

[30] Lewis described the arrival of food gifts as a 'blessing that just keeps going. It really shows the love.'

bring in food, and all that stuff: breakfast stuff, sausage, egg, soda pop, and all the usual food. For me it's one of the best blessings you can have. The people that come thought a lot of the deceased, you understand what I'm telling you?' This casual and dialectical use of the term *blessing* reflects the Evangelical Protestant Christian ethos discussed in the previous chapter, but it also makes sense because these men have no additional household responsibilities during this period. Often, I even observed men deferring all decisions about the more formal funeral arrangements to their wives and sisters, while often stating that they would not know what would look good or be appropriate. The funeral, as a highly aesthetic practice, was simultaneously considered a family affair and the woman's domain. It is important to note that these descriptions are only applicable when there is family cohesion and little to no conflict about the nature of the arrangements. However, that situation describes the vast majority of my fieldwork experience.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, women seem to have a much more complicated relationship with these food-gifting traditions than men do. While there were never any instances of a woman speaking of the practice in a totally negative way, there were also no instances of the unequivocally positive descriptions of the event that my male respondents provided. Viola provided one such ambivalent statement: 'There was a lot of it that was expected but still very strange because there are all of these people you are acquaintances with, but don't really know, but know the deceased, like my grandmother, are giving you food and saying 'Oh Baby, I'm so sorry,' and you're going who are you again?' While Viola is unlikely to be meeting more strangers or acquaintances than James or Richard, who are of similar ages, the notion of meeting individuals in the home being more difficult is interesting: as a young

woman, Viola is subject to a different set of expectations than are men her age. She would be expected to be more of a hostess, but additionally, women are expected to be more emotionally available, and individuals expect women to be more emotionally available (Hess 2000, Hess, Adams, and Kleck 2005). Likewise, women are expected to be more respectful and submissive to people who are in or perceive themselves to be in greater authority during social interactions (de Lemus 2012). This larger normative obligation can account for part of the greater stress women experience during the postmortem and funeral-food experience.

Lee, like Viola, is ambivalent. She acknowledges the work and contribution of other women, but also acknowledges that the situation may be overwhelming: 'All of this food coming to the door, from the ladies of the church or whatever. It's really good. I know sometimes it seems like it is overwhelming, but ah, if you've got a large family and people are in and out, you know, you need a lot of food.' Bev's account expands on this notion:

> You appreciate people coming, but after the funeral everyone's lives go back to normal and even the family needs some normalcy. Because after those two or three days with arrangements and visitations, and the actual uh funeral there is not normalcy and it is exhausting. To feel like, I, you know as the family that has been on the receiving end of people coming you are just ready for everybody to go away. Even though you're very grateful that they were there it is an exhausting. I think it helps the family realize that they need to get back to a normal routine for you. Even after losing someone you've got to get back to normal. You know, after everybody leaves, you have to get back to what this new normal is for you.

While women are culturally expected to be better multitaskers, in a Van Gennepian style the reintegration back into normal life can only happen after the crowds have withdrawn (Szameitat et al. 2015). The house/home can be seen as a locus of social engagement where women are still expected to have the most sway and as such can

have the most to lose when that private sphere is on display (Ginsburg 2016). Likewise, women who adhere to prevalent social mores can judge each other harshly and can judge each other's décor and housekeeping, even when the woman being judged is in the midst of a bereavement or other hardship in life (Lunbeck 1994: 265). However, it should be noted that while there were generally positive but mixed feelings about receiving food gifts, nowhere in the study or during my observations in the field did anyone state or imply that gifting foodstuffs was a burden, in any way annoying, or a undesired activity for the women preparing and presenting postmortem and funeral-food gifts.

Food is Love

One of the primary reasons food gifts are not seen as wholly negative is the deeply embedded community principle that postmortem and funeral-food gifts are tangible instances of individual and community love. Counihan (2004, 2009) has shown how the specific preparation and sharing of food can be love acts or represent love amongst families and, to a lesser extent, wider communities in various populations. Likewise, Myrte Hamburg, Catrin Finkenauer, and Carlo Schuengel have shown that 'Food offering . . . provides a way of coping with distress and empathic concern, as well as an effective means of offering social support, resulting in increased positive affect across interaction partners and an increase in interpersonal closeness' (2014: 7). Thus, food gifts, especially when embedded within a traditional framework, become a culturally understood way to share love with and show support to the bereaved. Catherine encapsulated the concept when she said, 'Everyone down here says food is love and it's true. Giving someone a warm

meal is a great way to say you care without saying anything. Especially when you don't know what to say because someone died.' In a follow-up interview, Catherine expanded on this thought, explaining that, while as a food-gift provider she would be unable to remain in the home of the deceased during the entire bereavement period, the foodstuffs she provided could and would. As such, when she was not there to offer a hug or other form of emotional support, her dish would be there to remind the bereaved of her and to provide emotional comfort in her stead. Luann also expressed this sentiment: 'Why do we take food? Because food is love you know. Food can fill and warm someone's body and soul at the same time.' In both Catherine's and Luann's statements, food is not a way of showing love: but it is *in and of itself* love. Similarly, Luann's statement mentions the soul, connecting the postmortem and funeral-food tradition with Evangelical Protestant Christian social mores discussed in chapters 4 and 7 again. In both Catherine and Luann's statements, the food presented as gifts become a tangible extension of the gift-givers' love for the bereaved.

However, the food gift can be more abstract as well: Viola said that 'There's a part of it from the people you know. The people who brought like three dishes because they wanted to make sure there was enough food, and are helping to clean up the garbage or wash dishes afterwards. There is a comfort to it because it sort of reinforces that friendship and community.' While Viola's statement retains the notion that food is an expression of individuals' love ('the people who brought like three dishes'), her statement ends with a more general expression of community membership and love. The notion that food-gift givers display love for a community as well as individuals persists as well. In Richard's words, 'Taking food isn't really

something that you think of as a chore — that you felt like you had to do. It's just one of those things you did. You'd show you care.'

During my observations, I saw people attending funerals and giving food gifts to individuals they had never met and only knew via reputation. As support mourners, including neighbors who usually have no social interaction and may not even know each other's names, would deliver food gifts during the postmortem and funeral period.[31] Similarly, I saw daughters deliver food to people that they had never met, but they knew had been part of the extended social networks of their deceased mothers. Likewise, women infrequently attended these events alone — mothers, sisters, daughters, and mothers-in-law all would attend and provide food as support mourners if traveling with a wider mourner. Because of this interaction, the individuals who received support in instances like this would often take their own food gift if the support mourner died or suffered a close bereavement. In this way, community bonds were not only reinforced, but the web of the social network was tightened. Thus, personal and community care are both specific and abstract concepts. As Lee notes, 'It's comforting to know that people care. A lot of times people don't know what to say or how to act, but if they bring something you, you know they care.'

Heirloom Dishes[32]

The love a person shows by preparing a dish does not always end when the cook dies. Sergei Kan has shown how the mortuary potlatch acted historically as a

[31] See chapter 2 for my discussion of support mourners.
[32] This section, alongside some context from the previous chapter, is being published in a different format as 'Funeral Food as Resurrection in the American South,' in *Dying to Eat: Cross-Cultural*

point of symbolic immortality for the Tlingit First Nation population of southeastern Alaska, but predominantly this is reverence for a general population of deceased ancestors to which the deceased are being committed (2016: 177). In fact, the whole notion of symbolic immortality seems slightly incongruent with the postmortem and funeral-food practices in the American South. Lee Garth Vigilant and John B. Williamson describe symbolic immortality as 'healthy individuals seek[ing] a sense of life continuity, or immortality, through symbolic means' (2003: 173). However, this is not the process described in the field:

> I do remember that when my grandmother passed on they wanted to bring her peach pie. She had these little 'ol Florida peaches, and you have to put ten tons of sugar on 'um to get 'um to, you know, but one of my aunts made them, and everyone had my grandmother's peach pie at her funeral. As far as I know my aunt always made my grandmother's pies from then on as long as she had peaches. – Nathen

Interesting language surrounds Nathen's narrative of his grandmother's peach pies. Nathen's grandmother used specific peaches from her garden in her pies, and Nathan often cited this detail when he described his grandmother's hardworking, make-do attitude. Her death and the corresponding loss of access to her garden after her home was sold, however, necessitated a change in the materiality of the food items. Yet, the change from 'these little 'ol Florida peaches' to larger, sweeter store-bought peaches never shifted the family's conceptualization of the pies. Likewise, upon her death Nathan's grandmother no longer baked the pies — Nathen's aunt did. However, although the aunt spent almost forty years cooking the peach pies, they were continually attributed to her mother. Even the members of Nathen's children's generation knew this dish as their great-grandmother's pie. Nathen's grandmother

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Perspectives on the Role of Food in Dying, Death, and Afterlives, ed. Candi Cann (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, forthcoming).

never set out to make peach pie her legacy; rather, this heirloom recipe is a tool that facilitates continuing bonds.

Dennis Klass argues that bereaved individuals do maintain such continuing bonds with the deceased, and that this is a normalizing behavior instead of the problematic factor that 'for much of the twentieth century . . . had been regarded as an indicator of pathology in grief' (2006: 884). Instead, Klass (1988, 1999) shows through his ethnographic work that continuing bonds can be an important element in survivors of a bereavement reconstructing and living healthy lives after a loss. However, these Southern postmortem and funeral-food traditions go far past the survivors' rebuilding of their lives after a loss. Instead of the personal, emotive functions of continuing bonds theory, Southern local practices can be seen in the cultural and social aspects of continuing bonds as Doris Francis, Leonie A. Kellaher, and Georgina Neophytou have explored them. In their work on cemetery visitation, Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou write that 'In the years that pass after the first anniversary of a death, some survivors find it emotionally important to keep the deceased's memory alive, to conduct a relationship with the departed that evolves as part of the survivor's present life, and to teach the value of family ties with the deceased to the next generation' (2005: 20). This can be seen within the Southern postmortem and funeral-food gift-giving tradition, for instance, when Lee shared that

> My Aunt Harriet used to always take fried pies. They were good too. And Momma use to always take pound cake. She made a wonderful pound cake. People would always want her to take that. My church women's groups assigns food, but if I'm asked for a dessert I'll bring that. If my daughter knows I'm not making it she'll make her grandmother's pound cake to bring anyway.

Lee's mother and aunt are remembered in the family and community through these particular dishes, which also act as agents of cohesion across generations and reinforce a family's shared sense of identity.

Food studies has long been a robust area in the study of continuing bonds. Christine Valentine (2008) offers examples of how the continuation of traditional eating patterns can function in the continuation of bonds in family narratives in England. Connectedly, scholars such as Denis Klass (1996) and Jeanne W. Rothaupt and Kent Becker (2007) have acknowledged and contributed to the prolific body of literature displaying continuing bonds when the living offer food gifts to the dead for the deceased to enjoy. In a more abstracted examination of the theory, food has been shown as one of the most obvious points of loss, as well as a major nexus of continuing bonds to one's former culture in immigrant populations. This is important because beyond merely providing a link to the departed, funeral food in the South creates and renews an identity through this connection with the dead and by performing cultural identity in a way similar to immigrant populations' use of food to continue, discontinue, or mourn their cultural identity prior to immigration (see Akhtar 1999, Henry et al. 2009). Similar to the loss of culturally significant dishes in immigrant populations, when the tradition of bringing specific food items associated with the memory of specific people to funeral gatherings is interrupted or stopped, the physically dead but socially active members of the family and community are at risk of social death.

Currently, there are major limitations to the contemporary understanding of social death. Timmermans and Sudnow (1998) describe social death as the treatment of a still-living person as a dead corpse. In regard to the heroic resuscitation incidents

that Timmermans and Sudnow study, this acts as a serviceable metric. However, as an overarching definition of social death, this classification is deeply problematic, primarily because, as I assert in the discussion of actor-network theory in chapter 1, the uncritical link of physical death with lack of agency is not a given. Michael Mulkay and John Ernst (1991) give a broader definition of social death, but their focus remains on the social death of the still-living or those nearing the transition to physical death rather than on the long-dead. Even the most current engagements with social death theory give little to no attention to the active social lives and eventual social death of the already physically deceased (Kralova 2016). Social death needs to be more broadly defined to include the physically dead, who are remembered most frequently via memorial; for the physically dead, social death is the ultimate outcome when the process of continuing bonds ceases, and they finally lose all agency or influence in the living world.

As mentioned previously, this acknowledgement of objects such as food, dead bodies, and the dead themselves as actors fits with material-semiotic methods and theories presented by scholars such as Akrich and Latour in their work with actor-network theory, John Law in his contributions to the same concept, and Donna Haraway in her theory of material-semiotic actors. Akrich, Latour, Law, and Haraway all describe ways in which objects, up to and including food and the dead, have agency and exert that agency over and with the living, thus effectively broadening the concept of social death extensively enough to effectively change it. As long as the dead are still able to influence the living, as shown in Jamieson's (1995) discussion of social death, they maintain agency and avoid social death.

For Norma's children and grandchildren, their primary, persistent, and ongoing interactions with any conceptualization of Norma's mother is via heirloom food items like Nathen's grandmother's peach pie: 'My mother was one of the big women of the church you know. I mean we both taught Sunday School, but everyone knew and liked her. Together we'd bring five or ten things together. Now that she's gone and I'm not as active anymore I'll choose one of her dishes and take depending on what I have on hand and what I think will be most appreciated.' Norma's granddaughter's exposure to her great-grandmother happens almost exclusively through such heirloom food items. The preparation of an heirloom dish means that stories of the individual to whom the matronymic refers are retold. These stories are handed down alongside the knowledge of the preparation of the dish itself. This process, however, is not always unbroken. Because food and funerals are so central to culture everywhere, but especially so in the American South, the serving of funeral dishes named after the long departed is a primary means of keeping that person socially active. When a memorial dish is not prepared on a regular basis, the individual being memorialized can be forgotten if other continuing bonds are not in place. When this happens, the individual formerly memorialized and active becomes functionally socially dead, and the individual loses any agency or power to influence the social world. However, if the dish is rediscovered, the individual has a chance of regaining agency. This reclaiming of agency after social death is the social resurrection outlined by John Mason (2003) and pioneered by Orlando Patterson (1982) and Ran Greenstein (1994). Such living memory acts a buffer, preventing the physically deceased from also transitioning fully into social death. This is not a static process. While recipes are retained, they are also intermittently lost, revived, and

added to. Jewel illustrates this process when she shares how she might continue her mother's adaptation of her grandmother's usual funeral-food gift: 'My mother had a funeral cake she makes that was my grandmother's. She would also always bring fried potatoes and sweet tea. I haven't had to go to a funeral on my own since she has gotten sick, but if something comes up I guess I'll take that. My grandmother's funeral cake and my mom's potatoes and tea.'

Conclusion

This chapter examined the importance of extended family and close female friends of the family, who are functionally considered family-of-choice, to the local funeral-food process. Men and women reported highly varied experiences of the labor of funeral-food events because women are expected to produce food and to host, and no similar expectations exist for men. Participation in funerals is far-reaching when accounting for this extended family, their production of food, and their hosting. These women were also afforded greater access to the house of the bereaved.

The concept of food as a blessing not only allows the gifting of purely secular food items the gravitas of familial celebration of their collective religion, but it also smooths over tensions related to the disproportionate division of labor on women. Moreover, the ability of the hostess(es) and the quality of the food can also be subject to scrutiny by other female members of the family and community, creating further challenges to the bereaved which may complicate their ability to grieve and process the death of a loved one. Still, the notion of food as love allows for not only nonverbal support to the bereaved, which may help to alleviate tensions on both sides

of the exchange, but also greater societal cohesion in that it helps to stabilize divisions of labor, while also allowing members of the community to remain symbolically in the home of the bereaved.

The dynamic tension between food and women's labor can be seen in the importance and preservation of heirloom recipes at funeral events. In regard to heirloom dishes, a tension exists between who prepares the food and the recipe from which the food originates. By emphasizing the Christian idea of charity and community, the recipe and the physically produced food item allows the living member of the community to maintain and strengthen the social bonds with the deceased creator of the recipe. In this sense, funeral-food items represent a conceptualization of family and community as multigenerational and expansive. Moreover, it should also be noted that these recipes are subject to change, reinterpretation, loss, or abandonment, all of which may eventually lead to a lasting social death. However, in a community where food is love, this process also allows for more recently deceased family members to be memorialized in dishes that might speak more emotively to the younger generations.

Conclusion

In a book, mainly on cemetery mortuary art, Mildred Miller and Pat Crooks refer in passing to the longstanding continuity of food gifts in the region. It is one of the very few mentions of Southern postmortem and funeral-food traditions in the literature: ‘The entire community became involved during the family’s bereavement. Any outside work was immediately taken over by the men while women provided plenty of food for the family and any visitors, a practice still observed in rural communities today’ (1990: 17–18). Miller and Crooks speak of the practice as a coming together of the entire community. However, this is only partially correct. During my time in the field, the vast majority of events at which postmortem and funeral-food gifts were exchanged and consumed were attended almost exclusively by individuals who identified as or were socially assumed to be white. The few events that were the exception mainly consisted of one or two African-American or Latinx individuals attending the public viewing and passing on a food gift from car to car in the parking lot.

There was, however, one notable exception. One of the first funerals I attended during my fieldwork was for an elderly Latina woman who had married into a large white Southern family when she was very young. I traveled to the viewing with one of my participants, and the woman’s white daughter-in-law greeted me warmly as we entered the funeral home. The daughter-in-law was personable, handling most of the hosting duties so that her husband, the deceased’s son, and his siblings could mourn and catch up with their extended family, who had traveled from out of town. After a bit of small talk, the daughter-in-law, who was informed of my

position as a researcher, drew me to the side and thanked me for my interest in her mother-in-law's service, but quickly warned me: 'I don't know how much it will help your study. You know, she was Mexican, and Catholic, and they just do things so different. I just don't want you to waste your time.' I thanked her again for having me there and speaking to me, and I assured her that I was very happy to be there because it was not a waste of my time. And it wasn't. The woman had married into a large white family, all of her children had married white-identifying individuals, very few individuals from the deceased's family of birth had been able to make the trip to attend the funeral, and, with the singular exception of an English rosary said over the deceased by a young priest, the viewing looked and progressed like every other event I attended during the duration of my fieldwork. That one exception, the rosary, acted as such an assault on the hegemonic white Protestant Evangelical Christianity pervasive in the area that both a member of the bereaved family and my participant were concerned that the event would be of no interest to my study of Southern funeral food. Southern postmortem and funeral-food gifts may be a community endeavor, but this is only true if community is defined not as the whole geographical area but instead as racially and religiously isolated sub-communities. As has been argued previously, when 'race often gets used as an analytical framing only in regard to [persons of racial and ethnic minorities]…. Such applications of race continue to normalize whiteness as the default' (Chisholm 2016: 257). This is true in the professional global securities context Amanda Chisholm was writing in, and true more generally as well.

Still, in the field, the participants were largely unreflexive of their hegemony. Only one participant, Ellen, said 'Everyone does funerals the same, don't they? Well,

except for the black churches. I've never been to one, but you can drive by and see it is different.' This can be seen as a function of Elijah Anderson's notion of 'white space,' which he defines as the ' . . . overwhelmingly white neighborhoods, restaurants, schools, universities, workplaces, churches and other associations, courthouses, and cemeteries, a situation that reinforces a normative sensibility in settings in which black people are typically absent, not expected, or marginalized when present' (2015: 10).

In and of itself, this is not necessarily a problem: the white experience deserves just as much attention as any other racial perspective. However, it cannot remain an unexamined default position if in-depth analysis is desired. Using Thursby's work, I discussed previously how there could not be an African American perspective, a Native American perspective, a Latinx perspective, and then a Southern perspective without implying that those earlier racial categories are not part of the Southern experience. If we as researchers are committed to decolonizing anthropology and the allied social research fields, we must explicitly turn the academic gaze on the white experience and no longer allow it to be presented as an unreflexive, default position. While this is not a comparative study, and more research is needed in this area, this study serves as a first step in this direction.

In addition to not allowing myself to treat whiteness as a default position but instead acknowledge the whiteness of my study, I outlined three primary goals for this project:

1. Examine if food and funeral rituals are linked.
2. Analyze what the importance of food shows about cultures of whiteness at the fieldwork location.

3. Discover how this specific culture of whiteness approaches, perceives and deals with death.

Chapter 6 examined the connection between the food items themselves and how those items are engaged with during the funerary period.

In this research, I have identified both a postmortem and a funerary period. In my Northwest Georgia fieldwork location, *the funeral* refers to more than just the funeral service: the funerary service, the visitation, the graveside service and the post-funeral meal were all referred to as 'the funeral.' These events mark the end of the postmortem period, which spans from the death of the decedent to the beginning of the funeral in which arrangements are made, and family and community members are notified of the bereavement. I have shown that during the postmortem and funeral period, members of the bereaved family's extended family and community give traditional food gifts to the bereaved family. As mentioned above, in this community, white Evangelical Protestant Christianity is an unreflected-upon norm. Specific foods are given during these periods, and the culmination of these specific food items is their transition into heirloom dishes that act as a reminder of a previously deceased person during a new bereavement in a way that delays the social death of the honored individual. Indeed, it is important to highlight that in regard to funeral-food traditions in the American South, rather than a single unified tradition, what can be seen is a network of traditions.

This culture of food gifting during the postmortem and funerary period does have implications on the local culture of whiteness. Indeed, whiteness in Northwest Georgia must be looked at intersectionally. The Evangelical Christian mores are both culturally important to the area and pervasive due to the number of participants in the

region. Likewise, the longtime division in the region between the Evangelical churches and the historically black churches embed the mores in the white experience. Ideas of community and fellowship displayed within the postmortem and funeral-food gifting traditions reflect these Evangelical Protestant Christian positions. Likewise, as discussed in chapters 5 and 6, while there may not be a robust body of academic literature about Southern white funeral-food traditions, there is a tradition of discussing these behaviors in pop-culture media such as literature, music, and personal blogs. This display in the popular arena allows for new pathways for individuals to learn and explore these traditions. Likewise, in the most prolific media such as the novels and Academy-Award winning films mentioned, there is a visual monolith of whiteness.

Finally, amongst this cohort in Northwest Georgia, death is shown to be a liminal period for the bereaved in which those they perceive as their community support them as they transition into a new post-death family unit. This support is largely given by women as representatives of their own families, and the postmortem and funeral period can be seen as an extended example of women's technical and emotional labor.

This research draws on the literature of the allied social research fields, predominantly anthropology, sociology, and human geography. However, it is uniquely positioned at the junction of the interdisciplinary research areas of death studies, food studies, and feminist studies, allowing new methods and insights for each arena. Little to no academic attention has been paid to the white funeral-food experience in the American South, allowing for this position to function as an unreflected-upon norm in the literature examining the experience of racial and

cultural minorities in the region, a situation this work sought to rectify. For a truly comprehensive examination of the American funeral-food experience, further projects such as this are needed in other American regions before a unified project can take place.

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Appendix 1: Participants

Becky – late 40s, mother of three, raised Southern Baptist but no longer actively participates in a church community.

Richard – mid 40s single, raised Southern Baptist but no longer actively participates in a church community.

Rose – mid 20s married with no children, Church of Christ.

Lee – late 60s, grew up in middle Tennessee but has lived in northwest Georgia for 40 plus years, Church of Christ, married and mother of two adult children.

Frank – mid 80s, retied widower, Southern Baptist, father of two adult children.*

Cynthia – late 40s, mother of one adult child, raised Southern Baptist.

Dakota – 19, single, Southern Baptist.

Ellen – late 50s, married, Episcopalian.

Norma – mid 60s, divorced mother of three adult children, Evangelical Methodist.

Viola – early 30s, married no children, raised Evangelical Methodist.

James – late 20s, co-habitating partner, raised attending a non-denominational church.*

Bridget – mid 60s, widow, Southern Baptist.

Denise – mid 50s, discovered mother of one adult child, Southern Baptist.*

Jewel – mid 30s, divorced, Southern Baptist.

Catherine – 20s, married, Southern Baptist.

Nathen – late 60s, married, father of two adult children, raised in northern Florida but lived in northwest Georgia for 50 plus years, Church of Christ.

Lewis – late 50s, divorced, Southern Baptist.

Frances – early 20s, single, Evangelical Presbyterian.*

Mary Michael – early 30s, single, Southern Baptist.

Luann – late 60s, married, mother of four adult children, Southern Baptist.

Bev – late 40s, married, mother of two adult children, Southern Baptist.*

*Denotes members of the author's family.

Appendix 2: Images

Contexts: The American South and Northwest Georgia

Figure RC1: Local business signage, Northwest Georgia, 2015

Figure PitH1: *Places in the Heart*, 1984: 0:03:56

Figure PitH2: *Places in the Heart*, 1984: 0:14:07

Figure PitH3: *Places in the Heart*, 1984: 0:14:40

Figure PitH4: *Places in the Heart*, 1984: 0:17:40

Figure PitH5: *Places in the Heart*, 1984: 0:17:45

Figure SL1: *Sordid Lives*, 2000: 0:6:30

Figure SL2: *Sordid Lives*, 2000: 0:6:25

Figure SL3: *Sordid Lives*, 2000: 0:21:51

Figure SL4: *Sordid Lives*, 2000: 1:47:24

Figure E1: *Elizabethtown*, 2005: 0:31:50

Figure E2: *Elizabethtown*, 2005: 0:31:50

Figure E3: *Elizabethtown*, 2005: 0:33:56

Figure E4: *Elizabethtown*, 2005: 0:32:44

Figure E5: *Elizabethtown*, 2005: 1:05:58

Figure AOC1: *August: Osage County*, 2013: 0:12:01

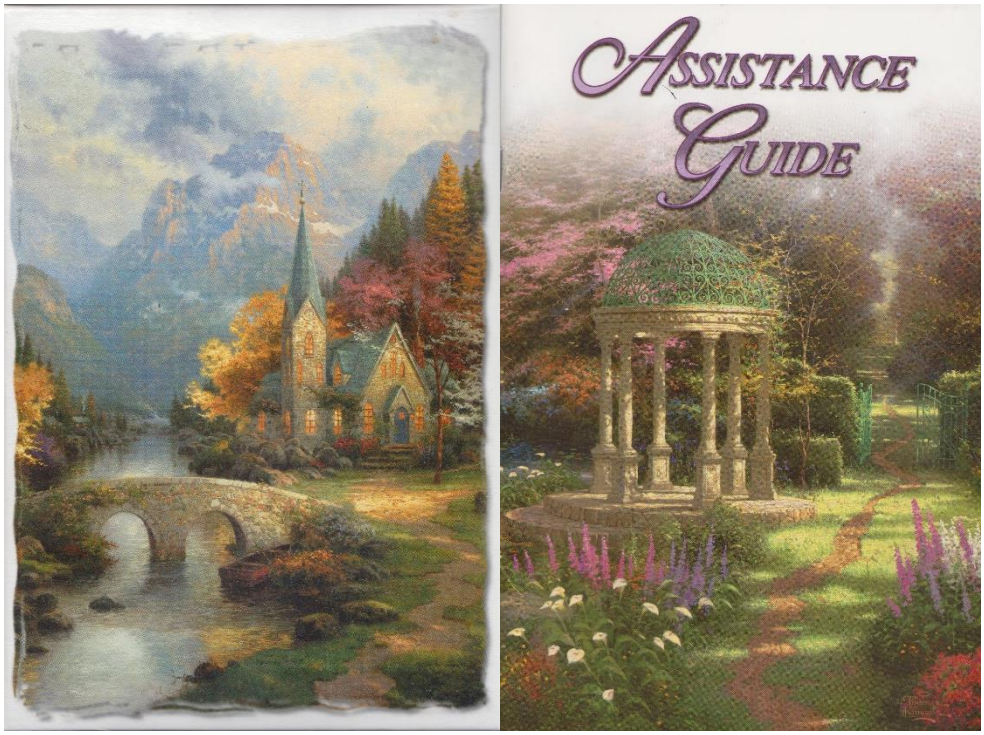
Figure AOC2: *August: Osage County*, 2013: 0:15:11

Figure AOC3: *August: Osage County*, 2013: 0:47:52

Figure AOC4: *August: Osage County*, 2013: 0:48:56

Figure AOC5: *August: Osage County*, 2013: 0:49:56

What's in a Casserole?: Material Culture of Southern Funeral Food



Thanking your friends for their help and sympathy.

"No man is an island. His death touches and affects his world of relatives, friends and associates in a direct and forceful way". It is virtuous to confide your feelings in others who benefited by, or shared in the life of a loved one - for sorrow shared is sorrow diminished.

We are hopeful that the following suggestions will be of assistance to you in acknowledging all of the various expressions of sympathy you receive during your bereavement.

It is customary to send the Acknowledgment Cards which your Funeral Director provides, within a period of ten days or two weeks following the funeral. A few words written on the inside of these Acknowledgments is the favored way to personally express your gratitude.

CLERGY: A personal note, either separate or included on a Acknowledgment designed for the clergy, should be sent. If an offering or honorarium is to be sent, it should be sent separately from the note thanking him for his consolation.

Dear Mr. Smith:
My husband and I thank you for the consolation you gave us during this trying time. The beauty of the services you conducted has helped us tremendously.

(NOTE: Dear Father Smith or Dear Dr. Smith is appropriate, but NOT Dear Reverend or Dear Rev. Smith).

BEARERS: (Including honorary). You may include a brief message or thanks on an Acknowledgment Card.

Thank you for your kindness in acting as a bearer for Father. We asked you because you were one of his closest friends.

LETTERS: Replies may be short and written on Acknowledgment Cards.

Thank you for your kind words of sympathy … it is so nice to have friends like you.

FLOWERS: A personal message or brief note may be written on the Acknowledgment Card.

The roses you sent for Dad were beautiful.

MEMORIALS: May be acknowledged the same as flowers.

Your contribution to the Community Hospital in Dad's memory was greatly appreciated.

FLOWERS RECEIVED FROM AN ORGANIZATION: An Acknowledgment Card may be sent to the leader of the group, including in your message reference to the other members.

The flowers sent by the members of the East Side Rotary Club were beautiful and greatly appreciated.

If members names are listed on the card, an Acknowledgment (without personal message) may be sent to each name listed.

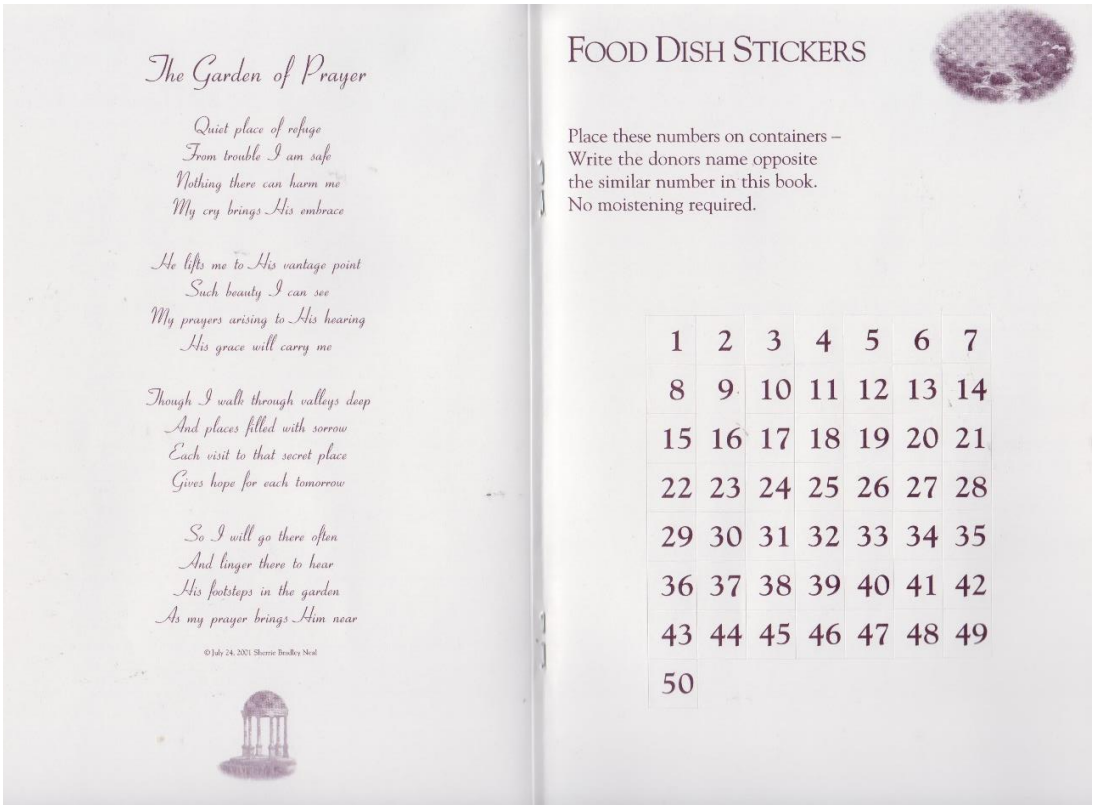
SYMPATHY CARDS: An acknowledgment is not necessary.

FRIENDS WHO VOLUNTEERED CARS AND SERVICES: A personal note on an Acknowledgment Card is appropriate.

CAR: Thank you, Bob, for the use of your car. It was needed and greatly appreciated.

SERVICE: You were so kind to stay with Mother after the funeral and help her through that first evening alone.

FOOD: The apple pie you sent to the house was delicious; thanks again for your thoughtfulness.



The Garden of Prayer

Quiet place of refuge
From trouble I am safe
Nothing there can harm me
My cry brings His embrace

He lifts me to His vantage point
Such beauty I can see
My prayers arising to His hearing
His grace will carry me

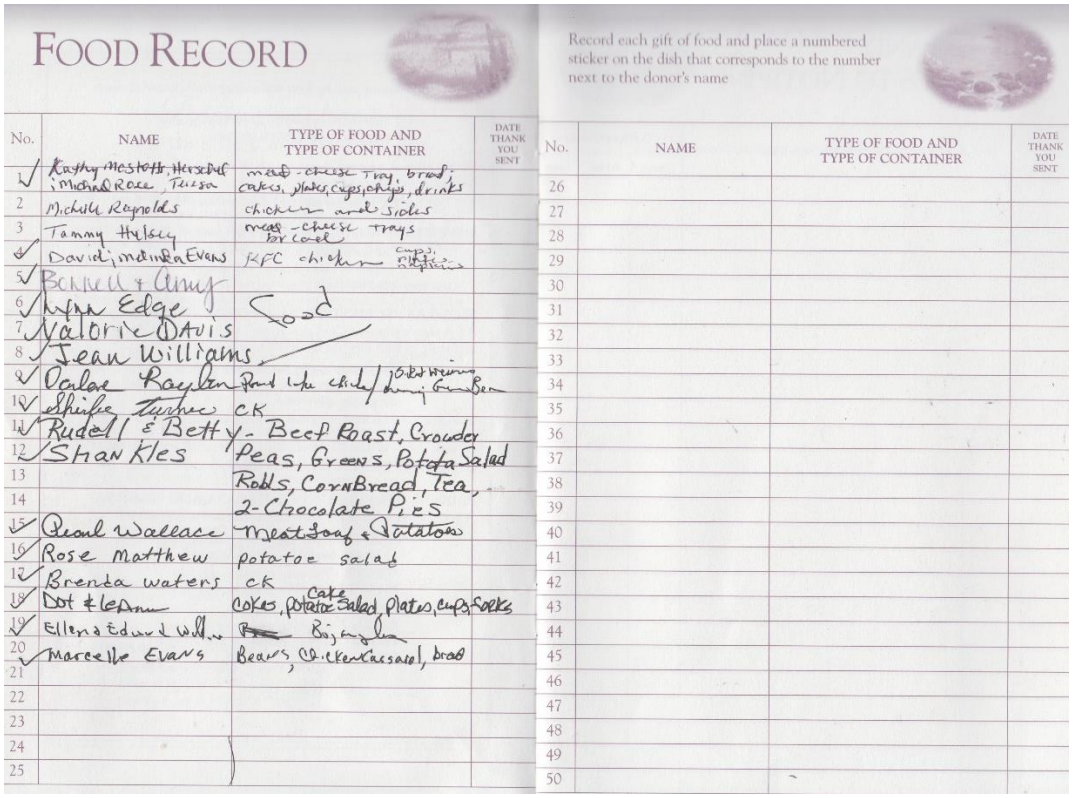
Though I walk through valleys deep
And places filled with sorrow
Each visit to that secret place
Gives hope for each tomorrow

So I will go there often
And linger there to hear
His footsteps in the garden
As my prayer brings Him near

FOOD DISH STICKERS

Place these numbers on containers –
Write the donors name opposite
the similar number in this book.
No moistening required.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35
36	37	38	39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46	47	48	49
50						



FOOD RECORD

Record each gift of food and place a numbered sticker on the dish that corresponds to the number next to the donor's name

No.	NAME	TYPE OF FOOD AND TYPE OF CONTAINER	DATE THANK YOU SENT
1	Kathy Mestath, Herself & Michael Rose Tulsa	meat - cheese Tray, bread; cakes, plates, cups, forks, drinks	
2	Michelle Reynolds	chicken and sides	
3	Tammy Hulsey	meat - cheese trays for Covel	
4	David, melinda Evans	KFC chicken cups, plates, napkins	
5	Bennett & Amy	Food	
6	Hope Edge		
7	Valorie Davis		
8	Jean Williams		
9	Darlene Rayburn	Bread + the chicken / Sliced Meat	
10	Shirley Turner	CK	
11	Rudell & Betty	- Beef Roast, Crowder	
12	Shan Kles	Peas, Greens, Potato Salad	
13		Rolls, Cornbread, Tea,	
14		2-Chocolate Pies	
15	Pearl Wallace	Meatloaf & Potatoes	
16	Rose Matthew	potatoe salad	
17	Brenda waters	CK	
18	Dot & Leann	Cakes, Potatoe Cake Salad, Plates, cups, forks	
19	Ellen & Edward Will...	Beans, Chicken casserol, bread	
20	Marcelle Evans		
21			
22			
23			
24			
25			

No.	NAME	TYPE OF FOOD AND TYPE OF CONTAINER	DATE THANK YOU SENT
26			
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Figure MC1: Funeral Food book from a funeral in 2012

Appendix 3: Recipes

Maw Maw Wallace's Chess Pie

3 eggs
2–4 Tbsp. flour (depending on humidity)
1½ cup white sugar
⅛ tsp. salt
¼ lb. butter
1 Tbsp. vanilla
4 Tbsp. buttermilk

Mix flour, salt w/sugar. Melt butter and add to sugar mixture. Mix well. Beat eggs and add to butter/sugar mix. Pour into unbaked pie shell. Bake 40–50 minutes at 300° F.

Mrs. Colman's Chicken & Dumplings

1 whole chicken without giblets
1 Vidalia onion, peeled and halved
3–4 large carrots, cut into chunks
3–4 stalks of celery, cut into chunks
1 bay leaf
salt to taste

3 cups flour
¾ tsp. baking soda
¾ tsp. salt
4½ Tbsp. very cold butter
1 cup sweet milk

Put the chicken and vegetables in a large stock pot; cover with water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and let simmer 1 hour.

Once the chicken is cooked, remove it, peel off the skin, and shred the meat with a fork.

Strain the remaining stock, keeping the vegetables aside.

In a clean bowl, mix the dry ingredients. Cut the butter into the mix until it looks like small pebbles. Slowly pour in the milk a quarter cup at a time. Do not over mix. Let the dough settle for about half an hour.

Bring the broth up until it's just barely boiling and drop in the dough one spoon-sized bit at a time. Allow them to cook for 6–7 minutes. Turn the heat down to low and add the chicken and chopped (cooked) vegetables back in (remove bay leaf) and let it cook for 15–20 minutes or until the broth has thickened. Season to taste with black pepper.

Ernestine Fryer's Watermelon Rind Pickles

4 quarts rind (1 quart rind equals 1 lb. green, cut off and nearly all pink, can leave a little pink)
1 pint pickling lime
2 gallons water

Dissolve lime in cold cold water; it will go to bottom. Pour the water over the rind and leave
overnight. Rinse well in water. Dissolve 1 tablespoon alum per gallon of water to cover rind. Cook about 1 hour till tender. Rinse well.

Put 2 tablespoon whole cloves, 3 sticks cinnamon present in a cheesecloth bag
sliced lemon
8 cups sugar
1 quart vinegar
another quart water

Combine all the above ingredients and simmer 10 minutes, then add rind. Simmer till clear, about 1 hour. Put in sterilized jars. Water bath for 10 minutes. Add a little red food coloring. Can add maraschino cherries.

Clara Willingham's Good Chicken Almond Salad

1 Tbsp. Knox gelatine
¼ cups water
red pepper
lemon juice
1 cup mayonnaise
1 cup heavy cream, whipped
½ tsp. salt
1½ cups chopped chicken
¾ cups toasted almonds

Soften gelatine in water. Dissolve over hot water. Combine with mayonnaise, juice, salt, and cream. Fold in chicken, peppers, and almonds. Chill in mold. Garnish with grapes.

Aunt Bonnelle's Acorn Squash

1 acorn squash
½ cup orange juice
½ cup packed brown sugar
¼ cup light syrup[33]
¼ cup margarine
2 tsp. grated lemon rind
¼ tsp. salt

Cut squash into ¾ inch thick slices. Put squash in greased pan. Pour orange juice over squash. Bake 30 minutes or till tender. Combine other ingredients. Bring to boil and simmer 5 minutes. Pour mix over squash. Bake uncovered about 15 to 20 minutes.

Mrs. Ruth Mull's Broccoli Casserole

2 cups cooked chopped broccoli
1 cup grated cheese
1 cup mayonnaise
2 eggs beaten
1 can condensed mushroom soup
1 tsp. salt.

Mix together. Crumble cheese cracker crumbs on top. Put in casserole and bake for 40 minutes at 350°F.

Deborah's Cauliflower Casserole

Cook cauliflower and break into casserole dish. Make cream sauce out of stock and milk. Pour over cauliflower in baking dish. Stick toasted almonds in cauliflower in cauliflower. Add butter and bread crumbs. Put cheese in sauce.

Aunt Teat's Stuffed Zucchini

2 zucchini
2 tsp. minced onion
3 tsp. butter
1 cup soft crumbs

[33] That is, light corn syrup.

½ cup tomato, cooked
salt and pepper

Cook squash in boiling salted water for 10 minutes. Cut in halves and scoop out centers. Mix pulp with remaining ingredients. Fill squash. Bake at 350°F for 15 minutes.

Nancy Wert's Vidalia Onion Casserole

¼ cup oleo[34]
3 medium Vidalias[35] chopped
2 cups grated Swiss cheese
1 cup crushed saltines
2 eggs
¾ cup half and half
1 tsp. salt ⅛ tsp. pepper
2 tsp. melted oleo

Melt ¼ cup oleo in large skillet and sauté onions until tender. Place one half of onions in 1½ quart casserole or deep-dish pie pan. Add 1 cup Swiss cheese and then ½ cup cracker crumbs. Repeat layers of onions and cheese. Beat eggs with half and half, salt and pepper. Pour evenly over casserole. Melt 2 tablespoons oleo in skillet and stir in remaining cracker crumbs; lightly brown and sprinkle over casserole. Bake at 350°F for 25 minutes. Serves 6 to 8

Jackie Hight's Wild Rice Casserole

1 cup wild rice (soak overnight and drain)
Grated onion
1 cup grated sharp cheese
1 cup chopped mushrooms
1 cup ripe olives chopped
1 cup hot water
½ cup salad oil
1 can tomatoes

Mix, cover and bake at 350°F for 1 hour or longer. Jackie always said it takes a long time.

[34] That is, margarine.
[35] Vidalia onions.

Great-Aunt Aemee's Caramel Pie

¾ cup plus 2 tsp. sugar
¼ cup water
¼ cup corn starch
¼ tsp. salt
2 cups milk
1 cup heavy cream
4 large egg yolks
2 tsp. vanilla
1 single 9" baked pie shell

Combine ¾ cup sugar and water in large saucepan. Cook over medium heat till sugar is melted and turns a deep amber color, about 12 to 15 minutes. Do not stir but be careful not to burn. Meanwhile combine remaining 2 teaspoons sugar, corn starch and salt in large bowl. Gradually whisk in milk and cream till smooth. When sugar is caramelized remove sauce from heat. Carefully add cream mixture, whisking in steady stream until blended (mix will foam hard). Return to heat and bring to boil, stirring gently to dissolve any remaining hardened caramel. Boil 1 minute and remove from heat. Beat yolks till light. Gradually whisk in 1 cup hot filling, return to saucepan, and stir constantly. Boil 1 minute more. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla. Pour into pie shell. Cool 15 minutes on wire rack. Cover and refrigerate at least 3 hours before serving. Serve with whipped cream and praline topping.

Mesi Chamblee's Adairsville Pound Cake

1 lb. butter
3½ cups flour
2⅔ cups sugar
8 medium sized eggs
8 tsp. coffee cream
1 tsp. vanilla

Separate eggs. Whip egg whites and 6 level tablespoons of the sugar while heating. Place this mix in the refrigerator until rest of cake is mixed. Cream butter. Gradually add the rest of the sugar, whip until light, and add egg yolks about two at a time, beating well after each addition. Add flour and cream alternately. Whip until mix is as light as possible. Then with mixer at low speed, whip in egg whites only long enough to mix well. Pour batter in lightly greased tube pan. Bake about 2 hours at 300°F.

Ms Nancy's Coconut Pie

3 eggs
1¼ cup sugar
¾ stick melted oleo
¼ cup buttermilk
½ tsp. vanilla

Beat eggs slightly with sugar and melted oleo. Mix well and 1 small coconut. Pour into unbaked pie shell. Bake at 350°F for 25 to 30 minutes. Doesn't look done—still shakes, but will firm up when cool. Knife stuck in center will come out a little greasy.

Granny's Biscuits

2 cups self-rising flour
6 Tbsp. Crisco (solid not liquid)[36]
1 cup milk

Mix pinch sugar with flour. Cut in Crisco finely. Pour milk in hole in center of flour. Stir with knife (knead until dough follows fork). Sprinkle with flour so you can roll the biscuits out. For soft biscuits, place the biscuits close together or touching each other; if placed farther apart they are crisper. Bake at 450°F or 475°F for 10 to 12 minutes, never over 15 minutes.

Grandmother Francis's Cranberry Congealed Salad

2 (3–ounce) packages raspberry-flavored gelatine
3 cups boiling water
1 (16–ounce) can whole-berry cranberry sauce
¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
⅛ tsp. ground cloves
2 Tbsp. grated orange rind
2 oranges, peeled, sectioned, and diced
1 Red Delicious apple, unpeeled and diced

Dissolve gelatine in boiling water in a large bowl; add cranberry sauce and next 3 ingredients, stirring until blended. Chill mixture until it's the consistency of unbeaten egg whites. Fold in fruit. Pour mixture into a lightly oiled 6–cup ring mold; cover and chill until firm.

[36] Vegetable shortening.

Shirley's Deviled Eggs

1 dozen hardboiled eggs, peeled
½ cup mayonnaise
1 Tbsp. yellow mustard
salt and pepper to taste
optional: sweet relish or chopped dill pickles to taste, mixed in, and paprika for garnish

Slice the eggs in half, remove yolks, and place the whites on a serving platter. Mash the yolks into a fine crumble using a fork. Add mix ingredients. Use a spoon to add mix back to the whites. Garnish if desired.

Geneva's Banana Pudding

⅓ cup all-purpose flour
dash salt
2½ cups milk
1 (14 ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
2 egg yolks
2 tsp. vanilla extract
3 cups sliced ripe bananas
1 box vanilla wafers
4 egg whites
¼ cup sugar

Mix flour and salt in a large sauce pan. Add milks and egg yolks to pan slowly, stirring constantly over medium heat until mixture thickens, about 7–8 minutes, then remove from heat. Stir in vanilla. Layer enough banana slices to cover the bottom of a 2 quart casserole dish. Cover the bananas with ⅓ of the pudding mixture, and layer with ⅓ of the vanilla wafers. Repeat layering, starting with bananas, then pudding, then vanilla wafers. Do the layering a third time as usual, except do not cover the pudding with wafers; place the wafers around the edges of the casserole, tucked into the pudding. Beat the egg whites at high speed with a mixer until they foam. Add the sugar gradually, and keep beating until stiff peaks form. Spread this over the top of the pudding, forming a seal to the edges. Bake pudding at 325°F for 25 minutes or until the meringue becomes light golden. Allow to cool 30 minutes before serving.